

**THE POETRY OF A.K. RAMANUJAN :  
A STUDY IN THE LIGHT OF INDIAN  
POETICS**

**A**

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## **DECLARATION**

*I solemnly declare that the thesis, entitled "The Poetry of A.K. Ramanujan: A Study in the Light of Indian Poetics" submitted by me for the award of Ph. D. Degree in English of the Bundelkhand University, Jhansi (U.P), is my own work and has not been submitted earlier. However, if anything contrary to this declaration is found later on, I shall be fully responsible for the consequences there of.*

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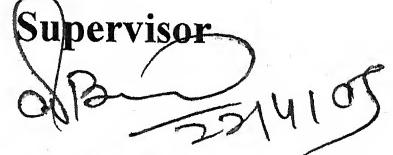
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## PREFACE

*A.K. Ramanujan (1929) is indisputably one of the most dynamic contemporary Indian poets in English. Among Indian English poets, A.K. Ramanujan is unambiguously different and has caught the imagination of the readers in a fascination way. To date, he has contributed the literary treasure of Indian English Poetry by a good literary output. He has so far composed a number of poems. The Striders (1996), Hokkulalli Huvilla (1969), Relations (1971), Selected Poems (1976), Samskara (1976), Mattu Itara (1977), Second Sight (1986), Mothers, Love Poem for a Wife 'I', Man and Woman in camera, Time and Time Again and a lot of translations- Speaking of Siva (1973) Hymns of Drowing (1981) and Folktales from India (1991).*

*He has been honoured by several literary awards, notably the prestigious "Padma Sri" in 1976 and the "Mac Arthur" Prize fellowship in 1983.*

*With his intellectual credentials and stylistic devices, he is a class by himself. He is superb in probing into the inner consciousness of his use of indigenous backdrop. He attempts to discover the labyrinths of his poetry in the context of the psychological formulations. This thesis is a deep analysis of the poetry of A.K Ramanujan and presents its critique on the basis of Indian Poetics.*

*The entire corpus of this thesis has been divided into seven successive chapters. The first chapter INTRODUCTION presents a general survey of poetry and the contribution of A.K.Ramanujan for the development of his poetic art in order to enrich the store of this genre with the themes of his poems.*

*The second chapter TRADITION AND EXPERIMENTS depicts the cultural heritage and his experiences of cultural ambivalence. He maintains the ideals of tradition through the myth and symbols from the past.*

*The third chapter POETIC IMAGINATION depicts the core of the hidden points of the imaginative range of the poet and the application of the suggestion (dhvani) of Indian poetics to his poetry. It also analyses Anandvardhana's idea of Kavya pratibha or Poetic imagination. The word imagination suggests the making of images in the mind's eyes. These inner images of human mind resemble the image of seen objects of life. Ramanujan uses scenes of the external phenomenology to express his imaginative height.*

*The fourth chapter TEXTURE OF MEANING reveals the theory of time and space which becomes a tool with him for internationalizing the process of culture and certain other anthropological issues. The concept of fate is indirectly related with the conception of time and space. The textural pattern in the composition of A.K Ramanujan can be understood only when one understands his method of composition.*

*The fifth chapter THE APPLICATION TO VAKROKTI THEORY reveals the linguistic competence and the oblique expression in the poetry of A.K Ramanujan. The art of poetry has taken the form of the poetic contents of the expression and the expressed. The theorist of Vakrokti, Kuntaka, brings some improvement in this theory.*

*The sixth chapter IMAGERY has analysed the poetic excellences of A.K. Ramanujan. The image is nothing but a mental representation of the poet and connoisseur. This chapter also analyses the role of Imagery in the embellishment of language and for the artistic beauty as a whole. A.K. Ramanujan has seen the objects of beauty in various natural scenes and deals them with the use of appropriate images.*

*The seventh, last chapter CONCLUSION, deals with various technical devices that he has used in his poetry. The technical devices take stock of his imagistic and symbolic expression psychological language and findings of entire structure.*

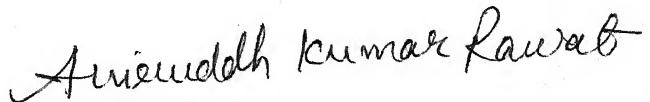
*I can not close these prefatory remarks without expressing my gratitude to all those who helped and inspired me in the preparation of the present work.*

*The present thesis was flagged off by my learned supervisor Dr. O.P. Budholia, Professor in the Department of English, Govt. K.R.G. College Gwalior, who is implicitly present throughout the pages of the thesis and thanks for giving valuable suggestion for final preparation of the manuscript before submitting.*

*I acknowledge my indebtedness to my co-supervisor Dr. Alka Rani Purwar, Head of the English Department, D.V. College, Orai for unfailing help, affection and guidance.*

*I must not forget to express my gratitude to my respected father (Shri Atma Ram Rawat), mother (Smt. Ramkumari Rawat), brothers (Pradyumna, Kuldeep), my father's sister (Smt. Ram Murti) and all those persons who supported and inspired me in all my academic endeavour, I could have in my life.*

*Finally, I bow my head before the Supreme power of God who always enlightened my path to complete my research work successfully. May God always be with me.*



Date:

Aniruddh Kumar Rawat

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# **CHAPTER – 1**

## ***INTRODUCTION***

## INTRODUCTION

Born in 1929 in Mysore, A.K Ramanujan is a poet who writes in three languages: Tamil Kannada and English. Deep rooted Indian sensibility and the global panorama make a human International poet: a poet who sincerely devotes his entire energy as a poet for humanity enmasse. He has shown his excellences in the art of translation and in the creative writing of poetry. Receiving his primary and secondary education from Mysore, he joined first Maharaja College and then Deccan college of Puna for his higher education. He joined Indian university during 1960-62 and he was awarded the prestigious full bright scholarship. After receiving his higher education,. Ramanujan worked as a lecturer in English Literature first at Quilon, Belgium and Baroda for eight years. Finally he joined the professorship of linguistics at Chicago in U.S.A.

A remarkable facet of Ramanujan's poetry lies in the expression of Indianess in spite of the foreign influences he underwent at America. Amidst some indefinite atmosphere he recalls back the memories of his childhood and these memories became the driving force in the poetry of A.K. Ramanujan. The poetry based on the objective expression and the poetry revealing the facts becomes the linguistic innovation in literature:

It is the recollection emotionalized in un-tranquil moments  
that appears to be the driving force behind much of  
Ramanujan's poetry.<sup>1</sup>

A sharp memory gives him a capacity to analyse the human relatives objectively in the entire bulk of his poetry. Many of his poems are personal in nature. They are centred around his immediate family, friends relatives and his native surroundings. However, he works on the principles of Indian Poetics where in he sees to de- personalize the human emotions to the best

of his ability. Despite the fact that home and home sickness become some permanent metaphors in his poetry, he excels his personal emotions while composing the lines of his poetry:

.....the image of home becomes a unifying force among individual and tradition, emotion and intellect and past and present. And again the same image-home-provides the poetic self of Ramanujan with a sense of cleansing and a sense of affirmation in facing the actualities of living.<sup>2</sup>

He is equally at home while describing mute animals, human relationships, and abstract feelings. Glimpses of both the rural and the urban are sighted in his works. If he can give a picturesque description of flowering trees in a poem like 'Ecology', he is also capable of writing on as mundane a subject as 'Epitaph' on a Street Dog. Then, while he is intensely personal in 'Love Poem for a Wife –1' he appears to be a thought provoking philosopher in "The Hindoo". He reads his Gita and is calm at all events.

The poetry of A.K Ramanujan presents a synchronised blend of tradition and modernity. He is in essence, a modernist with his sensibility rooted in tradition. Staunch supporter of all that is old. Analysing the core of his sensibility with a modernist's temperament, Ramanujan has been able to paint an objective portrayal of things.

There is an immense variety of themes in his poetry. His gift of portraying picturesque descriptions is widely reflected in his poems whether in the simple narration of common place occurrences or in the realistic portrayal of chronic social ailments. His poems are replete with irony, imagery, paradox, assonance and repetition. Though he does not follow a regular pattern in writing, there is a balance between sound and sense. Admiring the comprehensive and nature poetic style of Ramanujan, Taqi Ali Mirza writes:

The terseness of his diction, the consummate skill with which he introduces rhyme and assonance into his verse, the sharply etched crystallized images and the disciplined handling of language make Ramanujan one of the most significant poets in India today.<sup>3</sup>

Like Arun Kolatkar and Kamala Das, Ramanujan is also a poet who not only has a good grip over the English Language but can write with graceful ease in some regional languages as well. His command over English is not opposed to his knowledge of other languages. His poetry is thus an outcome of what he calls his 'inner' and 'outer' forms:

English and my disciplines(Linguistics, anthropology) give me my 'outer' forms linguistic, metrical, logical and other such ways of shaping experience, and my first thirty years in India, my frequent visits and field trips, my personal and professional preoccupations with Kannada, Tamil, the classics and folk lone give me my substance my 'inner' forms, images and symbols. They are continuous with each other and I can no longer tell what comes from where.<sup>4</sup>

Writing in "Art, Literature and the People" K.A. Abbas lamented that "Realism in literature was dismissed as journalism."<sup>5</sup>

The danger of being a writer overtly committed to social criticism is greater in fiction writing but it is no less important in the case of a poet too. The poet faces a dilemma here. If he ignores the social issues he is charged with topicality and a too obvious progressiveness. Though Mulk Raj Anand and A.K Ramanujan have little in common, both of them value human dignity and their anger is born out of it. Here it is pertinent to quote Ravi Nandan Sinha from his discussion of the role of anger in a writer's artistic make up. Discussing Anand he writes:

Anger, as expressed in his novels is only a veneer that conceals his love for freedom, justice and peace. It is a natural corollary of his fervent pre-occupation with social justice. He is a writer who values human dignity and is against all that militates against it. Seen in this light, it becomes obvious how or why such stock phrases like 'an angry writer; 'a committed writer', 'a leftist'; 'a propagandist', etc, are inadequate in summing up or even adumbrating his artistic priorities.<sup>6</sup>

Ramanujan is a poet who has the best of both the worlds, the traditional and the modern. He is subtle enough to appear as a poet not concerned with social questions, but he is sensitive enough to respond to social contradictions around him. He does not have the defect of romantic escapism, making it impossible for him to ignore what is happening around him. A number of his poems can be cited in support of this contention. In the following pages Ramanujan's social concerns will be discussed.

The intense social consciousness of Ramanujan marks his criticism with an unbiased candour. In this context, Lakshmi Raghuandan's remark seems to be quite appropriate:

In his search for self, Ramanujan like Ezekiel closely examines his defects, but Ramanujan does not totally reject Hinduism for it is a most comprehensive philosophy, like the house in 'Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House'. He does however condemn its practice in rigid conventionality as is evident in the four 'Hindoo poems'.<sup>7</sup>

In the poem titled "The Hindoo": he does not hurt a fly or a spider either; the poet persona not only mocks at the Hindu theology embracing the concept of birth and re-birth but he ridicules his own beliefs and attitudes as well. Nevertheless, he is unable to break free of the shackles of age. Old

ideas, which seem to have a firm grip over his analytical mind. Thus he bursts into a confession:

It's time I told you why I am so gentle, do not hurt a fly  
why, I can not hurt a spider either, not even a black widow,  
for who can tell who's who? Can you? It is once again my  
great swinging grandmother, and that other (playing at  
patience centered in his web) my one true ancestor.<sup>8</sup>

Ramanujan's 'Hindoo Poems' not only mirror his self-mockery but they also reveal his deep rooted contempt at the apparent notion of detachment. In 'The Hindoo: the only risk', he outrightly rejects the practice of denouncing spontaneous physical urges through a suppression of emotions. This, he feels, is not the way for attaining 'moksha', or the liberation of the soul. Struggling to maintain a cool facade at the sight of a woman's humiliation, or not being affected by a friend's suicide or resisting the temptation to pick up the kitchen knife to hurt oneself or 'Carve up wife a child' can not be regarded as an attempt towards true freedom of the soul.

Just to keep the heart's simple  
given beat  
through a neighbour's strip .  
tease or a  
friends suicide  
to keep one's hand away  
from the  
kitchen knife  
through that returning  
weekly need to  
maim oneself or carve  
up wife and  
child.<sup>9</sup>

A detailed analysis of Ramanujan's 'Hindoo' poems will show the poet's obvious dissatisfaction with the loopholes of the Hindu religion. Beneath the surface satire and the irreverent tone of these poems, we can hear the poet's cry of despair at the decline of his religion. Not suffering from the insecurities of rootlessness Ramanujan does not look upon himself as being alienated from his religio-cultural background. Thus, he is deeply pained at the derogatory state of Hinduism. He can not help expressing concern at the misinterpretation of the Hindu philosophy. On the one hand, he finds it impossible to sever his ties from his religion, while on the other, he just cannot overlook its discrepancies. The Hindoo: 'he reads his Gita and is calm at all events'. The poet finds it impossible to adopt a non-chalant attitude towards both virtue and vice and be immune to joys and sorrows alike. In this connection M.K Naik says:

Is the poet trying to suggest here that in spite of all his traditional training as a 'Sthitaprajna' (the man of tranquil wisdom) he is profoundly disturbed when he finds that in life sometimes elemental innocence become a sacrificial victim and realises that this strange law of life is more ancient than the most ancient of religious systems? <sup>10</sup>

A.K Ramanujan is the author of fifteen books which include verses in English and Kannada. His translations are as follows:

'Fifteen poems from classical Tamil Anthology' (1965), 'The Interior Landscape' (1967), 'No Lotus in the Navel' (Hokulalli Havilla) 1969, 'Speaking of Siva (1972) 'Hymns for the Drowning' (1981), 'Poems of Love and War' (1985) and the famed 'Sanskara' written earlier in 1976. He also co-edited a volume on folklore and Indian Literature. His original poetical compositions are 'The Striders' (1966), 'Relation's (1971), 'Selected Poems', (1976) and 'Second Sight' (1986), 'The Black Hen' was published posthumously.

'The Striders' was a poetry society recommendation and 'Speaking of Siva' a nominee for the National Book Award. Ramanujan was awarded 'Padma Sri' in 1976 and a 'Mac Arthur Prize' fellowship in 1983. He was also awarded the 'Gold Medal' of the 'Tamil Writers Association' for 'The Interior Landscape' in 1969. The coveted 'Sahitya Academy Award' was bestowed upon him posthumously. He has contributed widely to many well known journals and magazines both in India and abroad such as 'The Illustrated Weekly of India', 'Quest', Indian Literature 'Poetry' (Chicago): 'The Atlantic Monthly', 'Poetry North-West', 'The Carleton Miscellany', 'The American Scholar' and the 'London Magazine'; His poems also found a place in the widely acclaimed "The Penguin Book of Love Poems" (1974).

As this discussion has analysed the life parentage, the mode of Ramanujan's writing it appears appropriate now to bring into being the aspects which make the inner paradigm of his poetry. As a translator and as a poet who reveals the linguistic innovation, Ramanujan works sincerely and deeply on his memories. Even at America, he remembers his childhood, his roots of India. At the instance of T.S Eliot's Christian Pessimism, he works on the principles of Hinduism (Saivite) and that he has "an acute sense of sin" and of human fallibility. Atheistic Existentialism without Sarte's ethical passion is, I think, the right description of Ramanujan's worldview and to describe it in any other way involves strange and unconvincing explanations.<sup>11</sup>

However, as a linguist he relies upon the principles of Indian poetic at least on the theory of poetic imagination .It therefore, becomes a compulsion to discuss the principles of Indian poetics in brief.

One steps into a world altogether different from the world to stark reality, and yet appealing to our hearts as more real than reality. The heart accepts the world of art which our reason might reject. The Indian mind, with its love of the mystic, has always given to poetic or imaginative truth a

place higher than scientific truth. Both the mystic philosopher and the epic poet are 'seers' (r.s.i); they see deeper into the life of things, and in this they are alike. The difference lies only in the methods adopted by them to embody their vision. While the philosopher chooses the method of logical analysis and of abstract speculation, the poet prefers the synthetic method of concretising the abstract. It is only in this ideal sense that we can fully appreciate the traditional equation of the poet and the seer (nanrsih Kavirityuktam). The court-poets who revelled in wordy conceits to please their kings do not merit any comparison with the maha -kavi-s who were r.s.i-s. they were only practitioners of the poetic trade, and not at all, in the true sense of the word poets.

The Indian explanation of the vital principle of unity underlying, 'great' poems and plays is the much misunderstood theory of 'rasa'. It has something to do with mental states and emotions, but is not, as often made out, identical with them. The theory is not merely psychological; it embodies the Indian philosophy of aesthetics. Harmony or propriety (aucitya) is of its very essence, and it should be interpreted as a principle of harmony between various factors involved in a literary work. It is not a readymade scheme which can be indiscriminately applied to every work claiming to be poetry. The popular practice of regarding every Love song as an instance of *s.r.n.g.a.r.a.r.a.s.a.*, and every Limerick as an instance of *hasya-rasa*. is jejune.

It is only after making sure that, in a given work, there is aesthetic appeal of *rasa* that one can think of particularizing it as this or that. Anyway, it must be realized that the principle of *rasa* has different applications in the different literary forms. In the drama, where its demand is uppermost, it becomes the sole criterion for the depiction of characters and for the development of plot.

The Indian *rasa* theorists speak of this as sadharanikarana, and it is of the very essence of rasa. The poet's raw emotion, qua emotion, has no importance in poetry .It is only when it is impersonalised and universalised by the impact of the poet's genius that we have rasa. It is the Unique Pratibha (intuition) of the poet which accomplishes the miracle of giving to the particular the weight and force of the universal. We might conclude that rasa, as understood by the Indians, stands not only for the aesthetic value of emotions, but also for their universal significance which is the sine qua non of literature. So interpreted, highly sensuous descriptions of amours will cease to be instances of *Srngara-rasa* in literature; spectacular and sensational melodrama will not provide instances of dramatic *vira-rasa*, they will be only caricatures of the true *rasa*, though medieval Indian theorists like Rudrabhatta and Bhanudatta laboured under this misunderstanding. Among writers of Sanskrit poetics too, we have to distinguish, then, between pedants and connoisseurs, sastrins and sahridayas, the best representative of the latter being Anandavardhana with his sound principle of '*rasa dhvan*'.

Abhinavagupta, to give *rasa* a strong metaphysical foundation. But for him, aesthetic experience (*rasa*) could not have claimed an independent and equal status with the other accepted values of truth and goodness. After him, artists could say that the contemplation of the beautiful (*rasa*) was as much a stepping stone to the summum bonum (*moksa*) as that of the good (*dharma*) and the true (*tattva-Jnana*).<sup>12</sup>

We have mutually opposed ones, like *Srngara* (the erotic ) and *Santa* (the tranquil), *Hasya* (the comic) and *Karuna* (the pathetic), *Vira* (the heroic), and *Bhayanaaka* (the Fright-full), *Adbhuta* (the wonderful) and *Bibhatsa* (the revolting) .

The beauty even of ugliness is a *rasa-santa*. In such a comprehensive theory of beauty, we catch glimpses of the unique power of poetry which

can, when handed by genius, transform anything and everything to beauty. Artistic beauty, according to Indian theory, is something different, not only in degree but in kind, from natural beauty and from the human beauty of form. Poetry can distil aesthetic joy from the most unexpected things in the natural world and in the world of human relations. Nay, more, it can create an altogether new world of beauty undreamt of by ordinary men. This is the world of myths and metaphors, fancies and symbols. Though by ordinary standards they are untrue, they possess an aesthetic value or truth.

Traces of a similar idea can be detected in the Sanskrit works on rhetoric. Words described by grammar and meanings noted in the dictionary are not aesthetic as such; the poet shows his aesthetic sensibility, first, in his selection of words and meanings, and next, in the re-arrangement of these with an eye to their aesthetic value. He is guided by the principles of euphony and assonance in his devices of rhyme and alliteration. To invest his idea with a striking quality and a fresh charm, he will utilize the various figures based on the principles of metaphor, comparison, contrast, analogy, irony hyperbole, symmetrical, orders etc. His sense of rhythm is evidenced in his selection of metrical patterns. If we remember that the act of poetic creation is more intuitional than intellectual, we cannot fall into the error of regarding the figures and measures as external embellishments. They can be rightly looked upon as aspects of organic form. The Indian theorists declare that the unifying principle underlying all this technique is the principle of *atisaya* or 'idealization'. The poet deliberately departs from the normal and the natural; he unmakes and remakes the given reality, he fancies and idealises-all to achieve the goal of creating beauty out of human experience.

Finally, a word about the precise relation between poetic vision and rasa. The poetic world, as we have seen, is not a copy of the world of reality, but a parallel world of beauty answering only to the laws of imagination. To succeed, it must present us with a complex and yet a whole experience. Bits

of experience, however skillfully presented cannot be aesthetically satisfying. The secret of the whole literary process lies in the unfathomed depth of the human personality; and Sanskrit critics try to unravel the secret in their own way. Just as the Vedanta philosophers indicate the Absolute in a negative way, indicating successively what is not (*neti, neti*), so do rasa theorists indicate the nature of *rasa* by excluding many things from the realm of poetry. In our daily parlance, we are familiar with words and their meanings. We are aware of referential or denotative meanings, figurative meanings connotative meanings with emotional overtones, contextual meanings and even structural meanings of whole sentences. All these meanings are more or less definite or precise, the words and sentences serving as precise signs or symbols to communicate the intended meanings. Poetry has room for all this, but is essentially something plus, and that is *rasa*.

The concept of Sahitya between word and meaning has undergone considerable modification in the hands of Kuntaka. It is complete harmony and commensurateness between the expression and the expressed. So, it is a quality pertaining to word and idea Vying with each other in the matter of enchanting beauty of the composition. If an elevated thought is couched in an expression not befitting the sublimity or agreeableness of the content, it is unattractive and seems to be dead. On the other hand, a beautiful expression devoid of a suitable idea or expressing something other than the intended idea, is repulsive like a disease. The concept of 'Sahitya' emphasizes that the expression will be neither less nor more charming than the expressed; they are equal in this respect and beautify each other. Similarly, one word will vie with another and one idea will throw an open challenge to another in the matter of generating charm in the heart of a connoisseur of poetic art. It is also like mutual co-operation existing between two friends of equal merits. Then, again, he asserts that the

alliance, to be poetic, must have the speciality of being endowed with the quality of '*Vakrata*' and must be beautiful by the employment of '*Marga*' or *Riti*, *Guna*, *Alamkara*, *Vrtti* etc. all of which are comprehended under the same concept of *Vakrokti*, and which also in their turn completer with each other in making the poem beautiful.<sup>13</sup>

Kuntaka propounded the theory of *Vakrokti* which forms the nucleus of Indian poetics, in general and the theory of linguistic experiment in poetry, in particular. Here it seems necessary to analyse the principles of *Vakrokti* theory.

The theory of *Vakrokti* was one that sprang up as a reaction to the views of the Dhvani school, and was an attempt to reinstate the teachings of the ancient alamkara school. The concept of *Vakrokti* was dealt with from different points of view by writers old and new and with greater emphasis by the *alamkaravadins*. In fact, the realization that *Vakrokti* was an inherent feature of poetry was as old as Bhamaha, the earliest known exponent of the Alamkara school. However, it was Kuntaka (circa early 11<sup>th</sup> C.A.D.) who attempted to develop the thesis that *Vakrokti* was the 'Life of Poetry', in his treatise entitled *Vakroktijivita*.

For the earlier theorists '*Vakrokti*' had a wide connotation. To Bhamaha, *Vakrokti* was the basic feature of alamkaras. Without *Vakrata*-a certain quality of deviation-no expression would amount to a poetic figure, and Bhamaha rejects certain figures on the ground that they do not possess *Vakrokti*. In Bhamaha's theory, it is the poetic figure that determines poetic expression. Further, *Vakrokti* being a departure from the ordinary mode of expression, enters the province of *atisayokti* (hyperbolic expression) which should be, as much as possible, a feature of the poetic figure.<sup>14</sup>

Hence, it follows that to Bhamaha, *Vakrokti* determines the nature of poetry.

For Dandin too, the term *Vakrokti* has a similar wide connotation. He divided all poetic speech into two categories – namely, (1) *Svabhavokti* (2) *Vakrokti*. Under the latter are included all poetic figures except *Svabhavokti* (nature description). Hence in Dandin, *Vakrokti* is a collective name for all alamkaras other than *Svabhavokti*. All such figures are marked by a deviation from the ordinary mode of expression, and this gives them the common name *Vakrokti*. *Svabhavokti* is excluded from the group, being a description of nature, as it is.

The basic principle underlying Kuntaka's theory of *Vakrokti* is "that a certain striking deviation from the ordinary mode of expression of ideas constitute the essence of poetry".<sup>15</sup> His definition of poetry in a general way sums up his theory. According to Kuntaka:

"Poetry is blend of sound and sense which is established in a composition embodying the poetic activity of a deviational character, and which delights those who know the true nature of Poetry."<sup>16</sup>

Vakrata separates poetry from other forms of expression and is co-existent with the delightful nature of poetry. *Vakrokti* consists of the peculiar turn given to any expression due to the skill of the poet, and consequently rests on the poet's activity (*kavivyapara*), which is explained as an act of imagination on the part of the poet.<sup>17</sup> Thus Vakrata is totally related to and is the result of poet's genius.

Mere Vakrata (a circuitous turn of expression) alone does not make poetry. It must delight the mind of the reader who is responsive to the true beauty of poetry. The test of *Vakrokti* is its contribution to camatkara the aesthetic enjoyment experienced from a composition. Only such expression beautiful by *Vakrokti* being considered as poetry, Vakrata becomes the alamkara par excellence.

Kuntaka lays down that Vakrata is to be perceived in Poetic composition in six different aspects. They are:-

- (i) Varnavinyasa Vakrata- Vakrata in the composition of letters. (This covers the field of all *sabdalamkaras*),
- (ii) Padapurvvardha -Vakrata- in the use of nominal stems.
- (iii) Pada aparardha Vakrata-in the uses of suffixes,
- (iv) Vakya-Vakrata-in the composition of sentences (This covers the sphere of all *arthalamkaras*),
- (v) Prakarana Vakrata-in the changes made of the incidents selected in a story in the construction of the plot, and
- (vi) Prabandha Vakrata-in the composition of the entire work as a whole.

If the alamkara theorists were thinking of Vakrokti only in the sphere of *sabdalamkaras* and *arthalamkaras*, Kuntaka's concept of Vakrata is not restricted to those instances alone. Another important issue in Kuntaka's theory is his insistence that mere Vakrokti does not become poetry. Vakrata should produce Vicchitti-Poetic delectation. Any embellishment, in order to be acceptable must add to the enjoyable nature of the work.

With the recognition given to the *rasa-concept* by the dhvanivadins, Kuntaka could not deny its importance in poetry. His treatment of rasa is met with in his discussions on the poetic figure named rasavad, on the two margas (styles), and on Prakarana-Vakrata and prabandhavakrata. Due to his preoccupation with the concept of Vakrokti, Kuntaka could not consider rasa as the prime source of poetic appeal. Nevertheless, "Kuntaka admits the necessity of rasa but regards its delineation apparently as a special kind of realizing Vakratva in the composition".<sup>18</sup>

Kuntakas concept of marga (riti) too involves rasa. In Vicitra-marga-the ornate diction-the purpose of resorting to such elaborate expression is the conveyance of a particular

rasa. (This compares with the view in Dhvanyaloka that the verbal collocation Samghatana-involving long and frequent compounds is more capable of expressing rasas like raudra).

"In the former (i.e in Sukumaramarga-the simple diction) *rasa* becomes an *anga* (subordinate element) of the delineation of svabhava, while in the latter (i.e. vicitra marga) the ornamentation is to be done in accordance with the underlying motives of rasa ....."<sup>19</sup>.

Those aspects of Vakrokti known as Prakarana-Vakrata and prabandh – Vakrata deal with the changes effected by the poet in the original story to suit his requirements when plot is selected from existing tradition. The poet intent on writing a *Kavya* does not merely narrate a story as it occurs in ancient lore. He is at liberty to change, suppress or introduce incidents in the construction of his plot. He may lay emphasis on those situations in the story which he thinks best suited to depict the theme he has in mind. Apart from making changes in the constituent parts within the story, he may also change the entire story. Kuntaka illustrated these changes with reference to such dramas as *Abhijnana-Sakuntala*, *Vikramorvasiya* and *Venisamhara*.<sup>20</sup>

The purpose of resorting to such changes would be the manifestation of rasa (as Anandavardhana had pointed out already). In a poem or a drama, one dominant rasa must prevail throughout; and the other subsidiary rasas should help its intensification. The poet constructs his plot in accordance with the rasa to be presented. He leaves out incidents of the original story, introduces new situations or shifts emphasis so that the rasa he intends conveying is best realized. The original rasa too, may completely discarded in favour of a new one. The motive behind prakarana and prabandha-vakrata is the proper manifestation of rasa.

His foremost contribution could be named as his recognition of the importance of the poet's activity (Kavivyapara) in the birth of Creative

Literature. Union of sound and sense in poetry should be marked by the poet's creative activity. It seems appropriate to quote G. Vijaya Vardhana about the concept of Vakrokti :

"Vakrata is the result of the creative imagination possessed by the poet. Poetry becomes appealing only when it is the product of this imaginative activity. Without it there would be no perceivable difference between the languages of poetry and other prosaic compositions. Thus, Kavivyapara is indispensable and is the fundamental source of aesthetic delight."<sup>21</sup>

In Kuntaka's theory, Vakrokti being all-pervasive in poetry, Kavivyapara too (being at the root of Vakrokti) plays an importance part in all aspects of poetry. In the *niti* (*marga*) concept of Kuntaka, Kavivyapara is directly related with the differentiation of the three dictions. Sukumara *marga*, springs from the unsophisticated creative genius of the poet, while *vicitra marga* is the result of the dexterity acquired through learnings and practice. The *madhyama marga* is a blend of his natural genius and his learning.

Thus the basis of differentiation of the *margas* is the Kavivyapara. Similarly, in his concept of the *alamkaras* is due to the imaginative activity of the poet, without which no figure would be an embellishment. In short, all six types of Vakrata are the result of Kavivyapara.<sup>22</sup>

The tendency among most Sanskrit theorists was to examine poetry objectively and to determine its special attributes by analyzing its mode of expression in a scholarly way. The content that determined the mode expression was seldom taken into consideration. The dhvani theorists made a theoretical advance by accepting the reaction upon the responsive critic (*Sahrdaya*) as the criterion of the worth of poetry. Kuntaka understand poetry as the result of a peculiar mental process in the poet seeking

expression. Thus his view is subjective with emphasis upon the creative activity of the poet as the source of appeal.

Another contribution of Kuntaka was important in respect of the poetic figure. In the teaching of Anandavardhana and Abhinavagupta, the touch stone of all good poetry was the rasadhvani factor. They did not consider any figure to be justifiable in poetry unless there was an element of suggestion involved, or unless it was conducive to rasa and dhvani. A poetic figure could be beautiful by itself and contribute to Camatkara. It could justify its own existence. Alamkaras being an aspect of Vakrokti, Kuntaka could agree to the view of the old alamkarikas that poetry could be determined by the alamkaras employed.

Kuntaka's arguments for the poetic figure would run thus. Poetic speech is only embellished speech, for embellishment imparts Vakratva. It is the creative imaginations of the poet intent on a particular purpose that finds expression in embellished speech.

Consequently, alamkaras are not mere external decorations. They become part of the expression itself. Hence, Kuntaka disagrees with the view of the dhvani theorists who considered all poetic figures not involving suggestion as mere turns of expression (Vagvikalpa), and embellishment as external. According to Kuntaka:

Suggestion is not essential for an expression of it possesses viccitti born of Kavyayapara. His opinion would amount to the idea that external form is not detachable from the beauty it conveys.<sup>23</sup>

The concept of niti by Kuntaka to show that he had a better grasp of the aesthetics of poetry than most Sanskrit theorists. He vehemently opposed the naming of different nitis on the basis of geographical localities, saying that nitis were not peculiarities of any region like marriage between cousins. He was also opposed to considering certain ritis as inherently superiors and

certain as inferior. If any riti were inferior, why deal with it at all in a criticism of poetry? Riti too is born of Kavivyapara and a particular riti could be more appropriate to a given situation than another. However, they can never be superior or inferior by themselves.

Such, considerations show that Kuntaka's approach to the evaluation of poetry was aesthetically more satisfactory than those of many earlier theorists. Some of his views—particularly those on the poetic figure were considered authoritative by later writers of repute.

(Vide, for example, Visvanatha's idea of a poetic figure). Although his central theory of poetry was far-fetched and unrealistic, Kuntaka's worth as a theorist in Sanskrit poetics lies in these other ideas that he brought to light.

Thus, the discussion about the milieu, influences and the mode of Ramanujan's writings on the one hand and the principles of Indian poetics such as Rasa-dhvani and Vakrokti theory, on the other have a remarkable nearness. The Indian poetics to analyse the role of poetic imagination, because the concept of poetic imagination stands near to concept of poetic self in the poetry of A.K. Ramanujan. The remaining core chapters will be a specific study for analyzing the objectivisation and symbolization in the poetry of A.K. Ramanujan.

The theories of rasadhvani, Rasa-dhvani and Vakrokti arouses a sensibility for the transpersonalization or objectivization or symbolization of human emotions and that indeed can be analysed on the principles of Indian poetics in the entire body corpus of A.K. Ramanujan's poetry.

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# *CHAPTER – 2*

## *TRADITION AND EXPERIMENT*

## TRADITION AND EXPERIMENT

T. S. Eliot in his famous definition of poetry brings forth the importance of tradition and individual talent. To T.S.Eliot, tradition stands for the pastness of the past and modernity/experiment denotes the individual talent or the poetic imagination of the poet. Even the Vedic poetry represents an age when religion and science, life and literature, were almost interchangeable terms. The poets of the Vedic period regard hardly any distinction between the different aspects of human personality like feeling reason and imagination. When the function of the poet and the priest, of the mystic and myth maker still remained undivided.

Ramanujan is full of two sensibilities: One that is his cognition/Indian culture; and another that he derives in contact with Americans while working as a professor of English there. Sometimes, it seems that he oscillates between these two sensibilities, but he maintains the objective scenario in the entire bulk of his poetry. Above all Ramanujan experiments with different aspects of life both in India and in the west he, however remains an authentic India voice for its culture in his poetry:

The Indian ethos pervades Ramanujan's poems, and it is in the Indian ethos that the poet realizes himself. The reality of the poet's predicament is the reality of a Universal predicament the quest for individual identity. Therein lies the applicability and Universality of Ramanujan's theme.<sup>1</sup>

The question of identity becomes an aspect which analyses the original thinking of the poet. He thinks of the devaluation of moral values, social issues and political corruption in his poetry.

Ramanujan as a poet works on his childhood memories. His memories as part or traditional store of the knowledge become a device for

seeing the things in the present; and it, indeed, becomes his experimental composition, obviously, there lies a recurrent search for the root in his poetry, which is finally shaped in the form of memory. Even Vandana Dutta feels the over burden of memories in the poetry of A.K.Ramanujan:

No wonder, a large bulk of Ramanujan's poetical works deals with the Indian past. Memories of childhood cover the whole range of his imagination. In a number of poems, there is an accurate representation of certain instances.<sup>2</sup>

The notion of tradition constitutes a very significant element in Indian thinking. They particularly proud of the cultural heritage that has been inherited from ancestors. In this context place to quote Yogendra Singh:

It is sometimes held that a continual re-articulation of tradition in the writings of Indian sociologists, right from the time of the "pioneers" to the contemporary generation, only reflects the perpetual quest for an Indian identity for sociology in the face of challenges from the western paradigms both of science an society.<sup>3</sup>

Spirituality forms an inseparable part of Indian tradition without the mention of which any discussion on the former would be incomplete. It would be pertinent to give the words of Dr. Radha Krishnan here:

It is the intense spirituality of Indian and not any great political structure or social organisation that it has developed, that has enabled it to resist the ravages of time and the accidents of history:<sup>4</sup>

According to him, Spiritual experience forms the basis of the rich cultural tradition of India. Echoing the sentiments of Dr. Radha Krishnan, Swami Vivekananda says:

The one common ground that we have is our sacred tradition, our religion:<sup>5</sup>

An Indian poet in English who is well schooled in Indian philosophy, folk lore and religion (that is, Hinduism) is likely to experience a cultural ambivalence, Ramanujan's achievement lies infect- that he is able to fuse the two cultures together. Yet it is not a Tennysonian Compromise; when taken in its essence, his work has a modernist's temper; Malcolm Bradbury defines Modernism as follows:-

One characteristic of modernism is surely that, intruded between world and art, history and canvas or text, there is an active and reflexive consciousness, that of the artist. That fore grounded the artist insists on the elusiveness of his role, his unfixed social location, his function as expression not of a time, an ideology or a constituency but as a radical pioneer of experience. The art he produces thus manifests his discreetness, his distinctiveness, his withdrawal, and its specific appeal is to a state of affairs that does not yet exist, but might do so, and to an audience yet to come. It is his business to re-dispose his form, his language or his paint in order to reform it, privatise it, make it transhistorical.<sup>6</sup>

A.K. Ramanujan and Jayanta Mahapatra often come through as poets steeped in their cultural milieu despite the fact that Mahapatra is a third generation Cagthlic: Mahapatra deals mostly with inner landscape and therefore, there are fewer opportunities for him to comment on outmoded social customs as Ramanujan has. His comments on many traditional beliefs are caustic but this should not lead the reader to imagine that A.K.Ramanujan rejects his Hindu (Tamil Brahamanical) back ground. Despite his stay in the states for over thirty years, he was no Michael

Madhusudan Dutt to forsake his religious heritage by embracing another faith. He can be regarded as a kind of reformist but to say that he is not proud of being a Hindu is to miss the point of his poetry completely.

It is perhaps Ramanujan's long sojourn abroad that explains his persistent inclination with his Indian past both familial and racial. The past thus constitutes a major theme in his poetry. Speaking in the same vein, R. Parthasarathy says:

There is something to be said for exile, you learn your roots are deep.<sup>7</sup>

Despite being a modernist in essence, Ramanujan's roots are too deep to be amputated. It is true that he is exposed to a completely different cultural environment for a considerable period of time but nonetheless his links with his motherland are too strong to be severed. Driving home this point S.K.Desai claims that:

Ramanujan's expatriation is a marginal affair and his alienation is a myth created by critics. Though he lives in Chicago, he is all the time preoccupied with India, one of his continuing projects being collection of folk tales, proverbs, riddles which brings him to India once at least in two years.<sup>8</sup>

A.K. Ramanujan's poetry exemplifies how an Indian poet writing in the English language can derive strength from retracing his steps to his roots. In poem after poem, he recalls the memories of his childhood and his experiences of life in India. In his poems, one may discern an enlightened intellect looking at things in a dispassionate manner. Never the less, "there is no attempt to disown the richness of past experience".<sup>9</sup>

Acute awareness of traditional social behavioral patterns is a distinctive feature of Ramanujan's poetry. This encompasses the various customs, the religious standpoint, the prevalent social hierarchy and the

caste distinctions widely rampant in different parts of India. Though Ramanujan is consciously aware of his roots, he is not blind to the discrepancies of the native culture. "Small Town South India" is a short poem, laying bare the narrow mindedness of a certain section of people who are afraid to discard the age old superstitious beliefs, which have become an inseparable part of their existence. In contrast, we have the opinion of these broad-minded people who have ventured out of their shell and have had a taste of the wide world beyond. To the poet recently returned from the U.S.A. even the cow and buffaloes of the particular town seem to be within the clutches of tradition:

The street cows have trapezium

Faces.

Buffaloes shake off flies with a

twitch of ripples.<sup>10</sup>

As the poet returns to South India after a long period of absence, he experiences the suffocation of a drowning man. Sinking to the bottom of the sea-bed in a barrel is an expression of the poet's resentment at these shifting restrictions. The sun dons a pickled look through layers of seawater his toes appear greenish in colour as if affected by mildew while trees are "porous coral". As if this is not enough, he is encountered by the "City shark" and "the wifely dolphin": The poet expresses his anguish in the lines:

I sink to the sea-bed

in a barrel,

Water layers salt and pickle

the sun.

Toes mildew green, trees

are porous coral:

Ambush of city shark

and wifely dolphin.<sup>11</sup>

It was the course, the contact of Ramanujan with America as a professor of linguistics that brought a tussle between two cultures: the one that he inherits from his birth; and the other he develops in the contact of the western realism. Apart from the long line of imitators of the western models, two poets before A. K. Ramanujan that stand out as true heirs of Indian tradition and definitive experiments are Tagore and Sri Aurobindo, Ramanujan with his poetic vision that can penetrate unerringly into the eternal truth/objective delineation of the facts underlying our national myths, symbols and folktales might yet succeed in writing the essence of poetic principles. The Indian poetics as a critical treatise always stood for the ideal, and in all its myriad forums, has idealized the real and truthful and turned away from the starkly real. Indian poetics now throws out a challenge to contemporary poets of Indian English Literature to extract significance from life.

A. K. Ramanujan as a poet accepts this challenge in a positive manner of his outlook that is to be expanded in the range of his poetry. He is well-versed in Indian myths, epical stories and folklorism. In the poem "Mythologies" he reveals symbolically the traditional character Pootna, the female demon, for bringing the contemporary facts of human life.

The breast she offered was full  
of poison and milk  
Flashing eyes suddenly dull,  
her voice was silk.<sup>12</sup>

The above citation brings the evils in a woman. However, evil is met with the good and Lord Krishna whom she intends to kill redeems her from the bondage of life and death. Evil cannot be removed by the ways of the erroneous path; but it should be improved in the right directions. Failing in

her deadly mission to kill Lord Krishna with the twin images of "poison and milk", she was the blessed one who received redemption;

The child took her breast  
in his mouth and sucked  
it right out  
of her chest.

Her carcass stretched from  
north to south.<sup>221</sup>

Another poem which brings the skilful use of Indian myths and legendary figure is mythologies-2" Bringing back an age old mythical tale through his poetic imagination, Ramanujan deals with the tale of Hiranyakashyapa and his subsequent defeat in the hands of Lord Vishnu. Hiranyakashyapu has got as an evilman a boon to evade the essence of death on any public place; he however, meets his death by the omnipotent God. The message that one receives through this poem is the fact that man himself weaves the plot of his destruction:

"When the clever man asks  
the perfect boon:  
not to be slain by demon,  
god, or by  
beast, not by day not by  
night,  
by no manufactured weapon,  
not out  
of doors nor inside, not  
in the sky  
nor on earth,  
come now come soon  
Vishnu, man lion, neither

and both, to hold  
him in your lap to  
disembowel his pride  
with the steel  
glint of bare claws  
at twilight".<sup>13</sup>

All the conditions placed above brings the idea into being that Hiranyashyapa appears invincible but Ramanujan through Indian tradition materializes the truth about the mortality of each being on this earth. Again, he goes on to experiment that even the evil person with his erroneous intention can be transformed. He finally acknowledges his evils before the omnipresent god. He also prays to be redeemed from the cyclic of birth and death:

O Midnight sun, eclipse at  
noon,  
net of loopholes, a house all  
threshold,  
Connoisseur of negatives and  
assassin  
of Certitudes, slay now my  
faith in doubt.  
End my commerce with bat  
and night owe.  
Adjust my single eye, rainbow  
bubble,  
So I too may see all things  
double.<sup>14</sup>

In the poems analysed above, one-steps into a world altogether, different from the world of stark reality. The heart accepts the world of art

which our reason reject. The mind with its love of the mystic, has always given to poetic or imaginative truth a place higher than scientific truth. Indian tradition of poetry before the objective correlative theory of T.S.Eliot yields the fact of Sadharnikarana (transpersonalization) of human emotions:

Both of mystic philosopher and the epic poets are "Seers" they see deeper into the life of things, and in this they are alike. The difference lies only in the methods adopted by them to embody their vision .....It is only in this ideal sense that one can fully appreciate the traditional equation of the poet and the seer.<sup>15</sup>

In poems like "Conventions of Despair", the poet makes it explicitly clear that it is impossible for him to shun his roots completely and step into the shoes of modernity whole-heartedly. Ramanujan looks at traditions with an unbiased criticism. Nevertheless he remained loyal to the ideas, which entered into the psyche during his formative years in India.

Yes, I know all that I should  
be modern.

Marry again. See strippers at  
the Tease.

Touch Africa, Go to the movies.

Impale a six-inch spider  
Under a lens. Join the Test-  
ban or become the outsider.  
or pray to shake my fist  
(or whatever you call it)  
at a psychoanalyst.

And when I burn-  
I should smile, dry-eyed,

And nurse martinis like  
the Marginal Man.<sup>16</sup>

A deep analysis of his own personality convinces Ramanujan that he cannot compromise with his identity in terms of his Hindu Cultural heritage. So he cries out empathically:

'I must seek and will find  
my particular hell only in my  
hindu mind:  
must translate and turn  
till I blister and roast  
for certain lives to come,  
"eye-deep"  
in those boiling Creates of  
oil.<sup>17</sup>

Thus many of Ramanujan's poems reflect the fact that his roots bind him to the early years of his childhood. Though memories constitute a major section of Ramanujan's poetry he does not draw any succors by falling back on these reflections. At times he has a skeptical attitude even towards the nature of memory. The poem titled "Lines to a Granny" can still be regarded bordering on fond remembrances. Ramanujan has a great regard for his grandmother for she is a symbol of past glory. Here, the poet vividly recalls the breath taking fairy tales savoured by him long ago at his grandmother's knee. The fact that he yearns to relive those moments once again is a prominent streak of sentimentalism in his other wise detached sensibility. The poem begins with these lines:

Granny,  
tell me again in the dark  
about the wandering prince;  
and his steed, with a neem-

leaf mark  
upon his brow; will prance  
again to splash his noonday  
image  
in the sleep of these pools.  
He will break  
with sesame words  
known only to the birds,  
the cobweb curtained  
door; and wake  
the sentinel, the bawdy  
cook;  
the parrot in the cage  
will shout his name  
to the gossip of the kitchen's  
blowzy flame.<sup>18</sup>

The above lines bear a streak of similarity with walter De La Mare's Arabia wherein the poet writes:

Far are the shades of Arabia  
Where the princes ride at noon,<sup>19</sup>

Ramanujan Continues the tale of "The Sleeping Beauty" in the same dream like vein:

Let him, dear granny,  
Shape the darkness  
and take again  
the Princess  
whose breath would hardly  
strain  
the spider's design.<sup>20</sup>

As the poem draws to a close, the poet seems to overpower memory by obliterating its negative aspect. Thus, he quizzically asks his grandmother:

But tell me now: was it  
for some irony  
you have waited in death  
to let me learn again  
what once  
you learnt in youth,  
that this is no tale, but  
truth?<sup>21</sup>

P.K.J. Kurup has rightly pointed out that in the poetry of Ramanujan, The image of Home becomes a unifying force among individual and tradition, emotion and intellect and past and present. And again the same image home provides the poetic self of Ramanujan with a sense of cleansing and a sense of affirmation in facing the actualities of living.<sup>22</sup>

'A Minor Sacrifice' is a poem dealing with a popular Indian folklore coupled with an incident from the poet's past. The poem begins with a discussion of the well known tale of Indian mythology concerning the king Parikshit and his son Janamjaya. The first two stanzas describe the king's encounter with the sage having garlanded the saint's neck with a snake, followed by his curse and then the subsequent step taken by the king's son for the demolition of this poisonous reptile, thus trying to acquit his father of the fatal prophecy of snake bite:

'I'd Just heard that day  
of the mischievous king  
in the epic  
who kills a snake in the forest

and-thinks it would be such  
fun  
to garland a sage's neck  
with the cold dead thing,  
and so he does,  
and promptly earns a  
curse,  
an early death by snakebite.

His son vows vengeance  
and performs a sacrifice,  
a magic rite  
that draws every snake from  
everywhere,  
till snakes of every stripe  
begin to fall  
through the blazing air  
into his alter fires.<sup>23</sup>

The poet relates this incident to a similar one in his childhood, one day in his childhood, as the poet recalls, his uncle, a staunch believer in non-violence, being driven to exasperation, was forced to kill a scorpion.

Then that day, Uncle of  
all people,  
a man who shudders' at  
silk,  
for he loves the worm,  
who would never hurt a fly,  
but catch it most gently  
to look at it eye to eye  
and let it go,

suddenly strikes our  
first summer scorpions  
On the wall next of Gopu's bed  
with the ivory dragon head  
on his walking stick  
and shows us the ripe  
yellow poison-bead  
behind the sting.<sup>24</sup>

The traumatic experience caused by a scorpion's sting is effectively portrayed in Nissim Ezekiel's 'The Night of the Scorpion'. The sting of the scorpion mentioned in this poem reminds us of the intense pain suffered by the woman in Ezekiel's poem, the intensity of her trauma can be felt in the lines".

My mother twisted through  
and through  
groaning on a mat.<sup>25</sup>

To go back to Ramanujan's recollection, he remembers vividly his grandmother and his uncle enlightening the children on the subject of scorpions:

Grandmother then tut-tutting  
like a lizard.  
Tells us how a pregnant  
scorpion  
will took for a warm  
secret place,  
say, a little girl's  
underwear  
or a little boy's jockstrap,  
and then will burst her back

to let loose in her death  
a host of baby scorpionons.<sup>26</sup>

His uncle throws further light on these winged deadly insects by giving a picturesque though rather far-fetched description of their physical appearance:

They're quite red at birth  
the little one's Uncle says.  
They glow like hand-  
carved rubies  
From Peking, rudder than  
garnet,  
especially when you hold  
them up  
to the light  
And when they grow big,  
they take on the colour  
of gray,  
China Jade, Beautiful, beautiful,  
he says, shaking his marmoset  
head.<sup>145</sup>

Together with a lad named Shivanna, the poet hatches a conspiracy to get rid of the scorpions once and for all. Shivanna suggests that by casting a spell on them they can lure them inside a tree and then set fire to them enmasse. To the poets inquisitive queries. Shivanna replies:

Witchcraft, says he,  
shining darker than an ebony  
turtle.

We can make them come at our  
bidding

When the sun is in Scorpio,  
like guests to a Wedding,  
into the hole of this very tree,  
And they will burn in a bonfire  
you and I will light.<sup>145</sup>

In his eagerness, the poet wanted to begin the task immediately but Shivanna calmed him down saying that first they have to appease the scorpion god with hundred wingless grasshoppers caught on a Tuesday having the new moon:

Not so fast, kiddo.  
What can you get without a sacrifice?  
First, we have to feed the twelve handed god of scorpions something he loves as other gods love goats and rice  
For that you need one hundred live grasshoppers caught on a new moon Tuesday.  
But remember: no wings on those things.<sup>146</sup>

So, on the destined day the poet sets out along with another accomplice named Gopu in his cruel mission of massacre. They accomplish their task with surprising alacrity and deftness:

So we steal three pickle Jars  
at dawn  
on that breezy new moon

Tuesday.

Leaping and hopping all  
over the lawn,  
we become expert by noon  
at the common art  
of catching grasshoppers  
on the wing.<sup>146</sup>

Yet another aspect that lures and should to the principles of contemporary criticism is the use indigenous backdrop. The poem "A Leaky Tap after a Sister's Wedding" sets the Indian locale when the poet remembers his sister at his adulthood. This sort of device based on memories presents the re-reading of the social, mythical and cultural dimensions:

Our Sisters were of various sizes, one was ripe for a  
husband and we were not poor.<sup>27</sup>

As a linguist, Ramanujan employs the specific function of the words in his composition. The sound in the poetry defines the actual roles of the words. According to the poet the alliteration and the obliance expression workout the essentials of literature and this kind of expression comes to Indian mode of literature:

In the sound aspect alone, words in poetry will present a pattern of rhythm and rhyme, alliteration and assonance, unknown elsewhere; this is the *sabdalankara*. In there sense aspect, they acquire a heightening (*atisaya*) or undergo a transfiguration which is the sin quo non of the poetic, art. A Synonymy of alankara in this wide connotation is *vakrokti* or oblique expression.<sup>28</sup>

Ramanujan as a linguist adopts the oblique method of thematic contents, and imagery becomes its best tool for expression. In the poem "The Opposable Thumb," the poet uses three different images. The blind boy in the poem has been described as "a bud-like node complete with nail, phalanx and mole under the usual casual opposable Thumb".<sup>29</sup>

The second quality of the image lies with the Muslim Weaver thumb which "resembles" a puckered stump, sewn like a sausage head". The third aspect of the thumb rests with the finger of the grandmother. She has been deprived of other four fingers a standing testimony of her husband's temper. She has had to bear the burnt of her husband's "Knifing temper of Sunday morning half a century ago".<sup>30</sup>

Another very important poems for oblique expression of A.K.Ramanujan are "The Rickshaw-Wallah" and 'Still Another view of Grace'. The imagery of a "tattooed rickshaw-wallah" serves the purpose of memories obliquely:

His arms and legs were wholly  
literate  
in green and in red,  
the indelible  
names of friends long- dead.<sup>31</sup>

The arms and legs as perception/time present links the chain thoughts with that of the past by which he includes the memories of the long-dead friends. In another poem," Still Another View of Grace; Ramanujan yet again uses the oblique expression when he shows the irresistible sex appeal of a woman. The bodily gestures, the disheveled hair and the lustrous strands of silk with passionate awakening of carnal instinct in a woman become a wonderful example of the vakrokti theory in this poem:

Her tumbled hair  
suddenly known  
as silk in my angry hand,  
I shook a little.  
and took her, behind the  
laws of my land.<sup>32</sup>

The various parts of images of a human body are not the only source in Ramanujan's imagery; he extends these images to an extent by which he engulfs wider range of the world of animals, inanimate objects and even the world of supernatural objects:

My night full of ghosts from a  
sadness  
in a play, my left foot listens  
to my right football,  
a clock work clicking in  
the silence  
Within my walking.<sup>33</sup>

Ramanujan was consciously aware of his roots, which were steeped in tradition; he did not lack the ability to appreciate the modern outlook towards life. All along, he has been honest enough to acknowledge the total impact of influences which have shaped his poetic genius. Ramanujan asserted with Rama Jha in a conversation:

Yes, my knowledge of English has been deeply affected by my knowledge of Indian literature and poetics.....if English cuts us from our culture it won't get us very far....Indian English, when it is good, does get its nourishment....from each individual's knowledge of Indian culture and Indian languages. It certainly does for

me. That is what binds us back to our childhood and early years.<sup>34</sup>

He is often critical of certain beliefs and traditions, which have been handed down reverentially of the succeeding generation. In 'No Amnesiac King', the poet explodes the Shakuntala myth. He bristles at the callous manner in which Dushyanata treats his wife Shakuntala. Having married her in the seclusion of a hermitage, the king conveniently forgets his wife some time later. He regains his lost memory only at the sight of the wedding ring he had presented to Shakuntala, which was accidentally discovered in the belly of a fish:

One Knows by now one is no  
amnesiac

King, whatever mother may say  
or child believe.

One Cannot wait anymore in the  
back

of one's mind for that conspiracy  
of three fishermen and a palace cook  
of bring dressed in cardamom  
and clove,

the one well-timed memorable  
fish,

so one can cut straight with the  
royal knife

to the ring waiting in the belly,  
and recover at one stroke all

lost memory,  
make up for the years drained in  
cocktail glasses

among dry women and pickled  
men, and  
give back  
body to shadows, and unto the  
curse  
that comes on the boat with love.<sup>35</sup>

Here, the poet analyses almost the unpardonable offence of the king in forgetting Shakuntala and making her life miserable. He has a better opinion of common people of the present time who are more humane and considerate. Ramanujan's broadened outlook resulting from his stay in the west perpetuated him to question the untold reverence shown to a king with such a derogatory flaw in his nature. He recalls the myth as he waits for his wife endlessly at the sea beach. The sight of a bright pomfret fish probably reminds him of that fish of long ago which had swallowed Shakuntala's ring:

as I wait for my wife and  
watch  
the traffic  
in sea side market places  
and catch  
my breath at the flat-metal  
beauty  
of whole pomfret,  
round staring eyes and  
scales of  
silver,  
in the fisherman's pulsing  
basket,  
and will not ask, for I know

I cannot,  
which, if any, in its dead  
white belly  
has an uncooked signet ring and a forest legend  
of wandering king and waiting innocent,  
complete with fawn under tree and inverse  
images in the water of a stream that runs as if it  
doesn't.<sup>36</sup>

Here we are inclined to agree with K. Venkata Reddy who remarks:

As a modern poet Ramanujan shows no blind reverence for old myths and tradition.<sup>37</sup>

At times the glory of the Hindu heritage is overtly contrasted against the inglorious Indian present; "Some Indian Uses of History on a Rainy Day" is one such example. It presents three distinct pictures-each revealing the wide gulf between the past and the present. The first picture is that of a rainy day in Madras in 1965, the clerks Jostle with the porters for a lone seat in a bus:

Madras,  
1965, and rain.  
Head clerks from city banks  
curse, batter, elbow  
in vain the patchwork gangs  
of coolies in their scramble  
for the single seat  
in the seventh bus.<sup>38</sup>

Their Conversation revolves round king Harsha's reign when the emperor made thousands of monks stand in a row and distribute expensive gifts among them. They also mention the Chinese traveler Hiuentsang in the course of their talk. They get so carried away by their conversation that

they ultimately miss the eighth bus also, Then they have to depend only on their own two feet to carry them to their destination:

they tell each other how  
old king Harsha's men  
beat soft gongs  
to stand a crowd of ten  
thousand monks  
in a queue, to give them  
and the single visiting  
Chinaman  
a hundred pieces of gold,  
a peare, and a length of cloth;  
So, miss another bus, the eighth,  
and begin to walk, for king Harsha's  
monks had nothing but their own  
twofeet.<sup>74</sup>

In the above line, we get a glimpse of the chaos and disorder, which has seeped into the once disciplined Indian Society.

The second picture provided by the poem is of well-dressed fashionable Indians standing awestruck before the wonders of Egypt. These wide-eyed Indians who are mesmerised by Egyptian antiquities are hardly well-versed in the glorious heritage of their own motherland. They are probably ignorant that the fine fabrics which are draping the mummies have actually been imported from India. Thus, there is a satirical description of the so called Indian tourists:-

Full bright Indians; tiepins of ivory,  
Colour cameras for eyes, stand  
every July  
in Egypt among camels,

faces pressed against the past  
as against museum glass,  
tongue tasting dust,  
amazed at pyramid full  
of mummies swathed in millennia  
of Calicut muslin.<sup>74-75</sup>

The third section of the poem is a satirical vignette of an Indian professor of Sanskrit in Berlin in 1935. The professor is totally lost in an alien land. He struggles with the German language at every step and is at his wits' end trying to locate places and memories landmarks. Suddenly, the familiar sight of the "Swastika" symbol drawn on the arm of a stranger in a bus makes him feel at home. The "Swastika" interpreted at different levels by the Germans and the Indians ironically strikes a chord of familiarity. While the Hindus since the ancient times regard the "Swastika" as a good omen, the modern German holds an entirely different attitude towards it:

1935 Professor of Sanskrit  
on cultural exchange  
passing through; lost  
in Berlin rain; reduced  
to a literal, turbaned child  
spelling German signs on door,  
bus and shop,  
trying to guess go from stop;  
desperate  
for a way of telling apart  
a familiar street from a  
strange  
or east  
from west at night,

the brown dog that barks  
from the brown dog that  
doesn't,  
memorizing a foreign  
paradigm  
of lanterns, landmarks,  
a gothic lotus on the iron  
gate;  
suddenly comes home  
in English, gesture and  
Sanskrit,  
assimilating  
the swastika  
on the neighbour's arm  
in that roaring bus  
from a grey  
nowhere to a green.<sup>75</sup>

Although Ramanujan does not reject his cultural roots and Hindu heritage, he is essentially a modernist. He has a clear vision and makes good use of his analytical bent of mind. In 'Death and the Good Citizen', the poet offers divergent solutions for the disposal of the human body after death. From a modern and secular viewpoint of an environmentalist, the human body originates from nature, is sustained by nature and after death returns to nature. This return to nature is a fundamental principle of conservation according to which everything in our environment should be recycled. During one's life time the waste matter excreted by the body should be used as fertilizers to improve the quality of plants:

I know you told me,  
your night soil and all

your city's, goes still  
warm every morning  
in a government  
lorry, drippy (you said)  
but punctual by special  
arrangement to the municipal,  
gardens to make the grass  
grow tall for the cows  
in the village, the rhino  
in the zoo: and the oranges  
plump and glow, till  
they are a preternatural orange.<sup>39</sup>

'Ecology' is another such poem where the poet cannot help expressing his indignation at the stubborn refusal to do away with age-old familiarities, even if they are flowering trees. The poet's mother, allergic to the pervading fragrance of the Champak flowers, found herself suffering from acute migraine year after year. But she would brook no talk of having those trees cut. She required the flowers for the performance of her daily ritualistic worship. Moreover, being steeped in superstition, she could not bear to dissociate herself from these champak trees, even if they caused her unbearable physical suffering. This was a recurrent phenomenon every year in the rainy season, which could be avoided, had logic and reasoning prevailed:

The day after the first rain,  
for years, I would come home  
in a rage,  
for I could see from a mile away  
our three Red Champak Trees  
had done it again,

had burst into flower and  
given Mother  
her first blinding: migraine  
of the season  
with their street-long heavy-hung  
yellow pollen fog of a fragrance  
no wind could sift,  
no door could shut out from  
our black-  
pillared house.<sup>40</sup>

In the poem 'The Guru', Ramanujan established himself as a modernist who is not afraid to raise his voice against the flaws and discrepancies in our societal structure. He makes no bones about his disdain for the self proclaimed godmen who undertake the responsibility of enlightening the ignorant people. While on one hand, the pseudo guru makes no mention of charity towards humanity in general, on the other, he is meticulous about his own comforts:

Forgive the weasel his tooth  
Forgive the tiger his claw  
but do not forgive the woman  
her malice or the man his envy  
said the guru, as he moved on  
to ask me to clean his shoe,  
bake his bread and wash his  
clothes.<sup>41</sup>

The Guru makes pretence of being kind and compassionate as he preaches to show concern for animals. But he is completely bereft of as Shakespeare Coined the phrase, "The milk of human Kindness".<sup>42</sup>

"Give the dog his bone, the parrot  
his seed, the pet snake his mouse  
but do not give the woman her freedom  
nor the man his mid-day meal till  
he begs  
  
said the guru, as he went on  
do order his breakfast of eggs  
and news  
  
asking me to carry his chair to  
the dais.<sup>43</sup>

An analytical study of the poems of A.K. Ramanujan reveals the poet's strictly impartial mentality. His irreverent attitude to some of the traditional beliefs shows his ability to transcend the traditional outlook unflinchingly. Ramanujan is essentially a modern poet with a rationalist approach. He is rightly called the product of the education of enlightenment. To quote Taqi Ali Mirza:

R. Parthasarathy is closer to the mark when he says that Ramanujan's poetry is "the product of a specific culture" and that his real greatness lies in his ability to translate "this experience" into the terms of another culture".<sup>44</sup>

A.K. Ramanujan is not a traditional poet in the sense that he does not accept unquestioningly whatever cultural furniture has been handed down to him. At the same time, he does not aspire to be a modernist by rejecting his cultural roots. In his essay entitled "What is Indian in Indo- English poetry', Ezekiel highlights the blending of Indian and European Cultural elements in Ramanujan. Commenting on 'Conventions & Despair', he says that:

The poet tells us explicitly that he rejects the demand of the modern such as marrying again or becoming the outsider.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, the poet realises that in no way can he snap his roots from his tradition and one of the ways of coming to term with the onslaught of modernity is to accept the philosophical concept of Karma, which is an inseparable part of the tradition bound Hindu religion. Ramanujan's poetry asserts his quest for interpreting the traditional from a modern perspective. In order to bring home the point that despite his repeated assertions of trying to "Seek".<sup>46</sup>

His particular hell<sup>47</sup>, only in the "Hindu wind".<sup>48</sup> Ramanujan is essentially a modernist.

In the continuity of different poems, the one that appeals to the mind and heart of the general reader for the inner strife and inner turmoil if the poet about the cultural experiment apart from the burden of the tradition, is *Still Another View of Grace* filled with the Brahmanical order of thinking, there he presents the inner strife between two cultures: one that is innate and other that he borrows from the West:

The tension between two religions becomes more intensified when the poet remembers his Brahmin parentage and become nostalgic about the superiority of being a Brahmin: Bred Brahmin among singers of shivering hymns / I shudder to the bone of hungers that roam the street/ beyond the Constable's beat".<sup>49</sup>

Ramanujan as such Champions the cause of associating the multiplicity of religious and cultures. He hardly accepts the validity of the established historical and anthropological facts; he scrutinizes them; and this kind of scrutiny becomes the approach of experiment in his poetry.

Ramanujan accepts the balanced approach in life. He is a man who has his head firmly fixed on his shoulders and does not allow emotions to predominate his intellect. He has accepted the presence of both the shaping forces in his cultural back ground. But has refused to identify himself completely with any and many of them. The over all impression after making a critical analytical study of his poems is that there are multidimensional threads in the poetry of A.K.Ramanujan:

The refusal to accept fully the traditional and conventional code of parental heritage he inherits from his Brahamanical order makes him a poet of integrity-an integrity that fills his poetry with an open ended ness and a higher poetic consciousness. As a modernist he works on contraries that make the poet distinguish between body and nature, nature and man, tradition and modernity, nature and culture and the individual and poetic selves.<sup>50</sup>

There are some inhibitive traits in his poetry too. These inhibitive traits make the poet undergo some psychological devices such as memories and nostalgia.

In fact, Ramanujan is such an artist who brings the total unity of all times and uses it as the total consciousness of human mind. He also uses freely Indian myths, symbols and images for creating a sense of super refind consciousness and the sense of experimentation in his poetry.

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# ***CHAPTER – 3***

## ***POETIC IMAGINATION***

## POETIC IMAGINATION

Anandavardhana speaks of Imagination/ pratibha in relation to dhvani theory or the suggestive pattern. There are some apparent contradiction between imagination and reason. The imaginative process deals with the factual condition and the data of experience. Reason discards the traditional experiences. The poetry appeals our mind by the process of emotion that is the absolute domain of imagination.

The word imagination suggests the making of images-images in the mind's eyes which more or less resemble the images which are there when an object is seen; and in the simplest use of the term nothing more is implied. From this stand point the imagination is a peculiarly vivid form of memory.<sup>1</sup>

If memory is the prime force for the process of imagination, the poetry of A.K.Ramanujan comes very near to the vision of Indian poetic; for the entire poetic process of A.K.Ramanujan is filled with the process of memories. There are many poems in which Ramanujan uses particular image to a common reality of life through the power of his memories:

For Ramanujan memories which are perceptions that live through time, are a means to explore the nature of time. Through memories he is not seeking his roots (in the areas of darkness) nor is he exploring the wounded or healthy Hindu Civilization. He is using them simply to explore the existential problems of time and what it does to life.<sup>2</sup>

Memory thus becomes a process of self-exploration in the entire bulk of the poetry of A.K.Ramanujan.

The term "poetic" becomes objective in the case of Indian poetics. The poetic process not only recalls past sensations, but adds to them and

subtracts from them, making from the materials thus finished, new images which have no precise counterpart in nature. Thus, the poetic imagination is something different from the subjective knowledge; it objectifies our ideas and emotions:-

'The Poetic imagination is creative. It not only reproduces the remembered images of the senses, but compares them by the emotions, combines them into new vivid wholes and leaps to conclusions which remind us of the laborious conclusions of the reason, yet are quite different in methods and results.<sup>3</sup>

Ramanujan's Poetry explores the obsessive memories of childhood with analytic intelligence of the west. Obviously, there is a recurrent search for roots in his poetry which takes the form of memories of childhood and maturity as they have been distanced by his stay abroad. The terror felt at the sight of wriggling snakes and the shock received when he saw the corpse of a scantily clothed woman on the beach are but a few examples. The recollection of such incidents was mainly done while he was in America. His frequent visits to India seem to have been for the purpose of renewing his roots. As Vandana Datta opines:

No wonder, a large bulk of Ramanujan's poetical works deals with the Indian past. Memories of childhood cover the whole range of his imagination. In a number of poems there is an accurate representation of certain instances.<sup>4</sup>

The poem "Of Mothers Among Other Things" is one of the nostalgic reminisces of his childhood wherein he fondly recalls the image of his mother as she flits about the house doing her household chores. Bowed down with the pressure of domestic work, she has hardly any time to cater to her looks. The poet describes her uncared for physical appearance thus:

her hands are a wet eagle's two black pink-crinkled feet,  
one talon crippled in a garden trap set for a mouse. Her  
sarees do not cling they hang, loose feather of a one-time  
wing.<sup>5</sup>

The activities of his mother have been indelibly imprinted on his memory. That is why, even years later being thousands of miles away from home, he can vividly see the happenings of yester years before his mind's eye. He remembers his mother tending to the needs of babies crying in cradles, stitching ragged clothes with deft fingers and also keeping the floor of the Kitchen spotlessly clean. Thus he writes further:

My cold parchment tongue licks  
bark  
  
in the mouth when I see her four  
still sensible fingers slowly flex  
to pick a grain of rice from the  
Kitchen floor.<sup>6</sup>

The Archetypal image of the mother as a symbol of patience, endurance and self sacrifice is evident in the poem. The domestic experiences continue to enslave her. In this repressed atmosphere, she loses her individuality and her identity is lost amidst the familial duties.

In 'Still another for Mother', the poet describes a certain incident in London which recalls a flood of memories from his own past. In the Hyde Park Street, as he slowly tried to adapt him self in the alien land and gradually came to be accepted as one of the inmates of the place, the sight of a plump and comely woman and of a good looking, short stature man reminds him of situation in his own life. In his subconscious mind, the poet identifies the large buxom woman, who may have resembled "same friend's mother with his own mother". "The handsome short-limbed man with a five finger patch of gray laid on his widow's peak"<sup>7</sup> probably the lady's son

reminds the poet of himself. As the man walks away from his mother without turning back, the poet recollects his own separation from his family. He muses:

Perhaps they had fought.  
Worse still, perhaps they had  
not fought.<sup>8</sup>

The poet walks away from the scene pretending that neither he has the woman in question was really affected but in the innermost recesses of his mind.

Something opened  
in the past and I heard something  
shut  
in the future quietly  
Like the heavy door  
of my mother's black Pillared,  
nineteenth century  
silent house, given on her marriage day  
to my father, for a dowry.<sup>9</sup>

The 'heavy door' of his house that closed behind him when he left for the U.S.A. is perhaps symbolic of the door of childhood that was clamped shut as he stepped in to adulthood, journeying to the west, leaving behind his native soil. In this context, Lakshmi Raghunandan says, 'It is the same symbolic door of dissociation from others that closes in the future too for his alienation from mankind is envisaged.'<sup>10</sup> Lakshmi Raghunandan's assertion, however, must be taken with some reservation as the 'dissociation' she speaks of was never complete. Bruce King, writing in Modern Indian Poetry in English says, "In Ramanujan's *The Striders* (1966) and *Relations* (1971) Poetry seemed to grow out of Indian experience and sensibility with all its memories of family, local places, images beliefs and

history while having a modern stance with its scepticism, ironies and sense of living from moment to moment in a changing world in which older values and attitudes are often seen as unrealistic.<sup>11</sup>

An experience gets transformed through "a time exposure" into an apparent pattern. In "of Mothers, among other things" he is not speaking specifically of his mother, but of mothers in general, of human life in general, of the passage of time which brings in the aging process. Memories are used to explore the aging process from youth to middle age and then to old age:

I smell upon this twisted  
Black-bone tree the silk and white  
Petal of my mother's youth.

In "Still Another for Mother" memory holds together the past and present and the future and a general truth about what time does to man-woman relationship in course of time is hinted at. "Perhaps they had fought/Worse still, perhaps they had not fought/..... something opened/ in the past and I heard something shut/ in the future, quietly". Then there is a characteristic modern obsession with clocks, clock towers, watches and sundials in Ramanujan's poetry:

But who, among tourists,  
on a five-day tour, can put  
the clock back  
and run into sundial time?  
(On a Delhi sundial)

Time is the central reality in the Existentialist ontology within which Ramanujan's poetry has its existence and being, there is no God no faith, no hope, no transcendence (as in the Kierkegaardian Variety of Existentialism), no political and social action (as in Sartre's variety). In

'Prayers to Loral Murugan', for example there is neither bhakti nor faith; there is only irony and existential angst:

Lord of lost travellers,  
find us. Hunt us  
down.

Lord of answers  
cure us at once  
of prayers'

Politics is a matter of fun for him:

The dumb and the Colour-blind rise  
rapidly in politics...  
(compensations).

In' An image for Politics' he is bitterly satirical about politicians:

once, I'd only heard  
of a Chinese fancy dish  
of fish  
that rots  
till it comes alive  
and a maggot-spaghetti squirms  
where once a mackerels  
gasped for worms;  
cannibal  
devouring smaller cannibal  
till only two equal  
giants are left to struggle,  
entwined,  
like wrestlers on a cliff.

H.W. Williams is very near the truth but misses it when he speaks about Ramanujan's main unifying view of life as one of "Philosophic

detachment modified by a cool, analytic, scientific spirit that borders upon a total agnosticism, and also when he speaks of his 'total disgust with human behaviour especially in political and social behaviour'.<sup>12</sup> That he misses the truth is proved by the fact that Williams thinks that Ramanujan's anti romanticism, which resembles T.S.Eliot's Christian 'pessimism' has its source in his being a Hindu (Saivite) and that he has an acute sense of sin and of human fallibility.<sup>13</sup> Atheistic Existentialism without Sartre's ethical passion (is it the result of his long stay in America?) is, I think, the right description of Ramanujan's world-view and to describe it in any other way involves strange and unconvincing explanations.

The role of memory is directly linked to time and space theory. Memory as time past adjoins with time present. In Indian poetics the theory of *dhvani* comes near to the perception of memories which finally create the sense of imagination. Kuntaka and Mahimabhatta believe that the important elements of poetry can be expressed through *Anumana* (inference). This naturally raises the problem whether Nature Poetry or Svabhavokti can be called a figure of speech at all worth the name. He answers the question in the affirmative and supports his position by advancing the following arguments:

Things in the world of nature have indeed a two-fold aspect—the universal and the special. The former admits of varieties in contradistinction to the latter which is unique in its own way. It is this special aspect which is capable of being perceived by the senses and which also forms the subject of Imaginative Poetry"<sup>14</sup>

Now what is this Imagination in the Poet? It is the intuition which arises, out of the acquaintance for the nonce with the real nature of things, in the mind of the poet in concentration as a result of the contemplation of word and sense in keeping with the sentiment to be depicted. It is indeed

extolled as the third eye of the great god Siva who is known to perceive things, past, present and future, by its aid. So even common-place things, when they come out of the poet's imaginative mind attain the high status of poetry, So Svabhavoktican rankasa valid figure of speech when the thing described is so picturesquely presented to the mind of the reader that he feels he is actually beholding it in every detail.

To define the process of poetic imagination is to reveal the process of Creation.

The Indian poetics stresses repeatedly the connotative and denotative meanings in the comprehension of the poetic art. Apart from the connotation and denotations the poetic bulk of A.K.Ramanujan works out its oblique nature oblique in the sense that it reveals in details the range of his memories. The range of memories in his poetry becomes the imaginative part in his poetry for memories reveal the concept of time and space.

Poems in 'The Striders' which treat of memory and the relationship between past, present and various emotions, especially anxiety, fear, sexuality and nostalgia include 'Breaded Fish', "Looking for a cousin on a Swing", Small Scale Reflections On a Great House', 'Snakes' and so on. Memories of Childhood crowd the wide gamut of his imagination. In several of his poems, there is an accurate representation of certain instances. In the poem, 'Snakes', Ramanujan is often reminded of these wriggling creatures in mundane Situations. Not only that, he can also trace a similarity between snakes and his sister's plaits. Thus, as he is:

Walking in museums of quartz  
of the aisles of book-stacks,  
looking at their geometry  
without curves  
and the layers of transparency

that make them opaque,  
dwelling on the yellowier vein  
in the yellow amber  
or touching a book that has gold  
on the spine,  
I think of snakes.<sup>15</sup>

He also draws a comparison between the snakes and his sister's long braids:

.....the weave of her knee long  
braid has scales,  
their gleaming held by a score of  
clean new pins.  
I look till I see her hair  
against.<sup>16</sup>

He has a sub conscious fear of snakes which is traced back to an incident when a basketful of ritual cobras' had come to his house:

Their brown-wheat glisten ringed  
with ripples.  
They lick the room with their  
bodies,  
curves  
uncurling, writing a sibilant  
alphabet of panic  
on my floor.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, the suppressed memory of a half-naked dead woman on a sea beach is pushed on the surface when the poet is served a dish of breaded fish in the poem entitled 'Breaded Fish'. He was unable to concentrate on the delicacy before him as his mind raced back to the time when he had seen:

A dark half-naked  
length of woman, dead  
on the beach in a yard of cloth,  
dry, rolled by the ebb, breaded  
by the grained indifference  
of sand.<sup>18</sup>

As the incident flashed before his mind, he was greatly unsettled as he mentally rushed "For the shore, my heart beating in my mouth".<sup>19</sup>

The way in which childhood experiences assume a different shape in later life can be felt in 'Looking for a Cousin on a Swing': This recalls a trivial incident of sharing a swing with a girl cousin and after wards climbing a blossoming tree with her. The pleasant experience shared by the close proximity of a premature four or five year old girl and a slightly older boy of six or seven years was completely of innocent then:

When she was four or five  
she sat on a village swing  
and her cousin, six or seven,  
sat himself against her;  
with every lunge of the swing  
she fell him  
in the lunging pits  
of her feeling;  
and after wards  
we climbed a tree.<sup>20</sup>

Having given this description of innocent fun, Ramanujan is quick to shift the scene from the village of the past to the city of the present in which the same little girl, having now blossomed into a mature young woman is on the look out for companions to gratify her passion:

Now she looks for the swing in cities with fifteen suburbs and tries to be innocent about it.<sup>21</sup>

Here, we see how sin and corruption have seeped through the years of innocence, leaving their tainted imprint on the pristine experiences of life. Like Eliot, Ramanujan too feels that a world of innocence has been lost irretrievably.

The Poem 'Small-Reflections on a Great House' narrates the wonderful assimilative and digestive powers of the ancestral home that has an insatiable capacity not only to absorb the good things but also the unworthy actions. On the one hand, it offers a warm welcome to the various guests, son-in-law, wives coming from a poverty stricken background, sons returning with a brood of grand children and nephews who have laid down their lives while defending their country. On the other hand, it has no qualms about roping in other cows and keeping borrowed library books for more than the stipulated time. Thus, he writes:

Sometimes I think that nothing that ever comes into this house goes out, things come in everyday to lose themselves among other things lost long ago among other things lost long ago.<sup>22</sup>

In a humorous manner, Ramanujan shows the callous indifference of the people who have no scruples about keeping things belonging to other people:

Neighbours' dishes brought up with the greasy sweets they made all night the day before yesterday for the wedding anniversary of a god, never leave the house they enter, like the servants, the phonographs, the epilepsies in the blood.<sup>23</sup>

The ancestral house is seen as a symbol of the past about which the poet does not harbour any feelings of pride or sentiment. The idea that is reiterated in the poem is that the house has an infinite capacity not only to contain things and people but even new ideas lose their identity as they enter its threshold:

And ideas behave like rumours, once casually mentioned  
somewhere they come back to the door as prodigies born  
to prodigal fathers.<sup>24</sup>

The poem mentions many other diverse things like a beggar coming to the house carrying a violin, grand children reciting Sanskrit verses, uncles regaling the younger folk with interesting incidents centred around the older generation and the holy water of the river Ganga brought with care in a copper vessel. Finally, it ends with the description of the dead body of a nephew killed in was at the border, being brought to the house, without disturbing its inmates. There is also a casual jibe at the inefficiency of the Indian postal services:

The dead body of the relative was  
brought back in plane  
and train and military truck  
even before the telegram reached,  
on a perfectly good chatty  
afternoon.<sup>25</sup>

These seems to be an air of idle complacency about the house and the post office which stores everything in its womb, and detests any form of change.

Regarding Ramanujan's reminiscence of childhood memories, K.R.SrinivaraI Yeager says:

Ramanujan Summons from the hinterland of memories  
buried moments of suspense, surprise or agony and then

turns them into disturbingly vivid poems. The mutilated beggar, drowned woman-they are caught in their contortions and misery, like the denizens of Dante's Hell.<sup>26</sup>

In an litter view with Rama Jha, A.K.Ramanujan stressed the fact that the feelings which are there in the innermost core of our heart are often penned down in verse. One does not follow any particular dictum regarding the subject of poetry. In his own words:

All kinds of relationships there are, but one writes about what once feels one know best, Not what one wants to. You see, these are two very different things. It may be true, I ought to be writing about pollution, about ecology and the rest of it. If you truly feel about it, it will there some where, because one does not write according to doctrine. As I said, one does not know whether one writes even to be published.<sup>27</sup>

The poems 'Love Poem for a Wife I' and 'Love Poem for a Wife II' are intensely personal in nature and concern conjugal relationship. The poet regrets those years of childhood which he spent away from his wife. He feels that this fact has alienated him some what from her.

Really what keeps us apart at the end of years is unshared childhood. You cannot, for instance meet my father. He is some years dead. Neither can I meet yours; he has lately lost his temper and mellowed.<sup>28</sup>

The poet cannot forget the fact that it is because of the precious period of childhood which unfortunately remained unshared that he is a stranger to certain domains of his wife's past. His resentful voice is heard as he says:

Only two weeks ago, in Chicago

you and brother James started  
one of your old drags-out fights  
about where the bathroom is  
in the backyard.

North or south of the well  
next to the Jackfruit tree  
in your father's father's house  
in Alleppy. Sister in law  
and I were blank cut-outs  
fitted to our respective  
slots in room.-<sup>29</sup>

Thus, we see that for A. K. Ramanujan, shared experiences in childhood become a prerequisite for a meaningful and complete emotional attachment in adult life. He is so much obsessed with the idea of a shared past that he shuns any negative feelings towards incestuous relationships even. So, he further writes:

Only Egyptians had it right: their kings had sisters for  
queens to continue the incests of childhood into  
marriage.<sup>30</sup>

The role of imaginative in Indian Poetics is what T. S. Eliot says "Individual-Talent". Past merges with the present, forming a new matter i.e. poetry which fully describes the emotions of man. Kuntaka a great theoretician regards imagination as "pratibha" and T. S. Eliot regards it as "Talent". It is no doubt that the range of imagination is creative faculty of an artist. Being endowed with the power of imagination the poet can easily embody what he sees in concrete images. He can picturize the common things of life for two major functions of the poetry to amuse and to instruct. Thus the faculty of poetic imagination makes a poet the creator of the realistic and the abstract new points. To quote Kuntaka:

Pratibha or imagination is the Key stone of the poetic arch, whatever charm there be in poetry, all that is attributable only to Pratibha, The various elements of poetry such as *Rasa*, *Bhava* and Alankara have the poet's imagination for their soul and particularly in the case of Alankaras, this is very well pronounced.<sup>31</sup>

Ramanujan's poetry on the soaring wings of tradition as the range of his imagination becomes a poet of modernist view points. Ramanujan is essentially "a modernist committed to an ant historical depoliticized transnational consciousness and to stylistic experimentalism, like say, imagism and expressionism".<sup>32</sup>

Ramanujan displays wide range and great assurance so far as his use of the medium is concerned. He seems to write with effortless ease and yet there is a certain leanness and taunt ness about his lines. He is capable of giving his words myriad dimensions of meaning. Regarding Ramanujan's poetic craft, Kurup opines:

It is to the credit of Ramanujan that he could reach out from such a predicament to a state of creative freedom by means of cultivating a uniquely personal idiom.<sup>33</sup>

Ramanujan's style is not just derivative. It has an individuality of its own. As is evident throughout his poetry, in his style too, one notices Ramanujan's strict adherence to his roots. In his desire to portray the minutest details of everything that is Indian, he at times attempts to describe 'the indescribable' to use an expression used by Kurup. In fact, to quote Kurup again:

Such a poetic Process not only helps him achieve a remarkable precision and subtlety in describing the indescribable but it also helps his poetic self, preoccupied

with the desire to discover his roots, to catch the subtle nuances of vibrations of his Hindu sensibility.<sup>34</sup>

As an eminent Indian poet in English, A. K. Ramanujan enjoys a position of high acclaim. On the one hand, he delights in experimenting with language, while on the other his academic background in linguistics enables him to handle language with felicitous aptness. He is a poet who can give vent of his feelings and experiences just the way he wants to. Nowhere do we find him groping for the correct words for expression. At the same time, his poetry betrays a picture of lucid transparency. One does not have to read in between the lines to have to comprehend the meaning. His poetry boasts of a crystalline quality. C.L.L. Jayaprada quotes with approval Chirantan Kulshreshtha:

Chirantan Kulshreshtha has aptly commented that Ramanujan's poetry shows a "chiseled workmanship".<sup>35</sup>

The Poetic, Craft of A.K. Ramanujan incorporate a number of elements. An apt choice of words, vivid imagery, picturesque representations and a tendency for precision and detail are the hallmarks of his craftsmanship. In this connection it would be pertinent to quote the noted critic Taqi Ali Mirza.

.....a word of two about Ramanujan's accomplishments as a craftsman. The terseness of his diction, the consummate skill with which he introduces rhyme and assonance into the verse, the sharply etched, crystallized images and the disciplined handling of language make Ramanujan one of the most significant poets in India today. The image, no doubt, plays a key role in Ramanujan's art but...he does not rely solely on the image for the effectiveness of communication...

Ramanujan appears to be quite fond of skillfully creating tableau-like effects in many of his poems.<sup>36</sup>

In another poem titled 'Still Another View of Grace', Ramanujan gives an oblique reference to a woman's irresistible sex appeal. He admits to having been totally roused by her dishevelled hair, which appears to be like lustrous strands of silk to his passionately awakened carnal instincts:

Her tumbled hair  
Suddenly known  
as silk in my angry  
hand, I shook  
a little  
and took her behind the laws  
of my land.<sup>37</sup>

Day and night are traditional symbols associated with life and death respectively. 'Some times', a brief poem, consisting of three couplets describes day and night as a passage of time with the dark night predominating over the bright day. The idea implied in this poem corresponds to the fundamental principle of Hindu philosophy, that is, the fruits reaped in the present life are actually the consequences of the actions of a previous existence:

every morning  
is a morning after,  
only night has a roof  
and the day has weals  
on her back; as if  
she had slept on a rafter.<sup>38</sup>

The tree is a recurring image in Ramanujan's poetry. He explains the symbolic value of the tree in his poem entitled Christmas. 'Christmas, the festival which commemorates the birth of Christ is celebrated in December,

the very month which signifies the death of the calendar year. This Juxtaposition of birth and death is symbolized by the tree as it is paradoxically dead and alive at the same time. The tree is compared to an angle that is shut at one end and opens at the others. He describes the contradictory nature of his tree in these lines:

Bare  
with December,  
open  
and shut  
as an angle  
a skinny Janus,  
my tree is two in one.<sup>39</sup>

In warmer climates, the tree presents a sight:

of greens,  
a shock of leaf  
upon Christmas eyes.<sup>40</sup>

The bare branches of the tree and for a moment he loses his own identity. Like the new born parrots he is in a dilemma:

For a moment, I no  
longer know  
leaf from parrot  
of branch from root  
nor, for that matter  
that tree  
from you or me.<sup>41</sup>

Through the image of the tree the poet conveys that the same Life Force, (an expression popularised by Bernard Shaw) Permeates in all living things.

The tree symbolising the essential unity of creation is again seen in the poem 'One Reads'. The Picturesque description of the tree's shadow merged into the beggar's reflection is again an awareness of the basic oneness of all beings:

the sunlight beggar squatting  
on his shadow, clotting  
the antlers of bare. April's trees.<sup>42</sup>

In the famous poem 'A river', Ramanujan gives a different image of the river. Unlike most poets who are mesmerised by the gushing flow of the river, he draws our attention to the immense destruction caused by it. Thus, one can say that though Ramanujan does have his pick of imagery from nature, he gives these images a completely different dimension.

Apart from nature city-life also forms an important source of imagery for A.K.Ramanujan. "An Image for Politics" is a case in point. Here, he expresses his contempt for the so- called civilized men of society. He uses an image of a man eater to lay bare the true selves, of politicians, who in their struggle for power, have no scruples about treading on each other's feet. To quote Kurup:

The poet attempts an objective correlative to the politics of sheer cannibalism by presenting the image of the eater who finally gets eaten up.<sup>43</sup>

Cannibal  
devouring smaller cannibal  
till only two equal  
giants are left to struggle  
entwined  
like wrestlers on a cliff  
and at last  
only one

omnipotent  
maggot creaser who sent  
his rival and lived.<sup>44</sup>

The inaccurate focus of the lens results in the formation of a distorted and blurred image:

half man, half tree,  
the left above the right,  
they slide to meet  
in a symmetry.<sup>45</sup>

The image and symbol serve as powerful tools in the poetic craftsmanship of A.K.Ramanujan. Here, it will not be out of place to quote the critic A. N. Dwivedi who calls Ramanujan as:

A poet of striking imagery and perfect language with "an eye for the specific physiognomy of an object or situation...."<sup>46</sup>

Ramanujan makes use of various poetic devices most effectively. He incorporates the various poetic devices in his poems with great precision and detail. One of the foremost among these is his subtle use of irony. In his poem, "A River", Ramanujan leaves no stone unturned to express his resentment against the indifferent attitude of poets to human misery. The river Vaikai in Madurai presents an ugly sight in summer. It fails to arouse the poetic Muse in any way. Poets prefer to describe the turbulent mood of the river when it is flooded with water. Ramanujan satirises the insensibility of these poets who pay no heed to the immense wreckage caused by the overflowing river. They prefer to sing only of its swelling bosom:

In "some Indian Uses of History on a Rainy Day", the poet mercilessly satirises the professor in Sanskrit Caught between the Eastern and Western cultures. The irony of

the professor struggling with the German Language and feeling at home in English is accentuated by his "assimilating/the Swastika/on the neighbour's arm.<sup>47</sup>

The 'Swastika' has no religious connotation. It is merely the symbol of fascism. There is plenty of wit and irony in the poem, 'Small Scale Reflections on a Great House' also. The poet not only appreciates the assimilative nature of the traditional joint family system but there is also a tinge of sarcasm when he describes that once an object, be it animate or inanimate, enters the portals of the house, it remains within its premises forever. In 'Obituary' too, we notice that the tone of the poem is comic, ironic and anti-romantic. Here, he does not mourn his father's death as an irreparable loss but in a matter-of-fact manner, gives an objective picture of the consequences of the death. Pragmatism, which is a hallmark of Ramanujan's poetic craft, is evident in the lines:

he left us  
a changed mother  
and more than  
one annual ritual.<sup>48</sup>

The cool impersonality of Ramanujan's poetic self enables him to treat his subjective experiences with an air of objectivity and detachment. To quote Harriet Zinnias in this context:

Although Mr. Ramanujan writes frequently about his childhood Indian experiences and thus flavours the poems with images of fig trees, mynahs, snakes, Madurai, a Delhi Sundial, he is completely western in his language, diction and attitude towards the object.<sup>49</sup>

But to say that Ramanujan completely ignored the subjective aspect of memory would not be a dispassionate viewpoint. In fact more often than not, he aims at a fusion of the subjective and the objective aspects into a

unified poetic experience. One cannot really accuse him of being an unmoved observer of the varied situations and human experiences in life. The poet himself mocks at such cool, Philosophical detachment in 'The Hindoo- The Only Risk':

At the Bottom of all this bottomless enterprise to keep  
simple hearts gain beat the only risk is heartlessness.<sup>50</sup>

Actually, Ramanujan plays the role of a detached critic in an attempt to present an objective picture of his experiences without being emotional or Judgemental.

The expression 'Pot bellied/bud' occurring in A Poem on Particulars' is one such example. A similar expression used in the same poem is "a finger-print of green".<sup>51</sup>

Hyphenated words and expressions are common features of Ramanujan's poetry. This proficiency in languages and his mastery in linguistics enable him to form compound words with remarkable ease. Thus, his poems abound with expressions like 'linen dolls', "shop-windows", "bridge-parties", "fancy-dish", "Slit eyed-Chinaman", Willow-Pattern plate", "bead-eyed", "needle-pines", "tree-tasseled light" and so on.

One often notices in Ramanujan's verse an intelligent play on words which is employed not just to create an impressive effect but it serves as a subtle aid in conveying the desired message to the reader. In 'Snakes' he writes:

The snake man wreathes their writhing  
round his neck  
for father's smiling money  
a clockwork clicking in the silence  
within my walking.  
the click shod-heel suddenly strikes  
and slashes on a snake.<sup>52</sup>

In Looking for a cousin on a swing; he says:

not only in the crotch of a tree  
that looked as if it would burst  
under every leaf  
in to a brood of scarlet figs.<sup>53</sup>

Another example is evident in "Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House:"

they come back to the door as  
prodigies  
born to prodigal fathers.<sup>54</sup>

Ramanujan handles this repetitive device with laudable ease and grace, without lending an air of monotony to the poem. A few examples are given below:

dwelling on the yellowier vein  
in the yellow amber."

Snakes

"City of temples and poets  
who sing of cities and temples"

A River "

yellow trees bind over broken glass  
and the walls of Central Jail  
drip with spring's labumum  
yellows, yellow on yellow"

It does not follow but when in  
the Street.

"Down there, blacks look back  
and whites, they look blacker"

Take care.

Though Ramanujan is consciously anti-romantic, there are certain rare glimpses of a soft, shimmering quality, which one may dare to call dream-like in his poetry. The poem "Lines to a Granny", describes the age-old tale of the Sleeping Beauty:

He will break  
with sesame words  
Known only to the birds,  
the cobweb curtained door,  
and wake  
the sentinel the bawdy cook,  
Let him, dear granny,  
shape the darkness  
and take again  
the princess.<sup>55</sup>

A study of Ramanujan's poems reveals that the area of his vocabulary are as varied as his themes are. There is hardly any sphere which he leaves untouched. Thus, we have images and expressions relating to as diverse fields as science, geography, geometry, mythology and religion, to mention a selected few. He is particularly fond of borrowing imagery from geometry-like 'Parabolas of hope'(Anxiety), "Parallax of several eclipses" (on the very possible Jaundice of an Unborn Daughter) "trapezium faces" (small town, South India) "routine rectangle" (Christmas). Several words are borrowed from Botany. We find expression like 'Sausage-head (The opposable Thumb). "The half eaten Sandwich", "Lettuce and Salami" (still life), "fancy-dish/of fish and" maggot spaghetti" (An image for politics.)

Ramanujan has not neglected the Geography words like "brackish", water layers 'Sea bed (small Town, South India) and 'island' (No man is an Island). In his poem 'Christmas, he employs geometric figures to establish a

link with Euclid. Euclid, the noted mathematician, though not present in physical form, lives through his books on mathematics. Similarly, the poet too is dead and alive at the same time:

Euclid's ghost

arrest

life for me.<sup>56</sup>

Above mentioned sources, Ramanujan borrows ample words from various other areas as History, Religion, Nature, Animal World and so on. Thus, the list is endless.

Another aspect of Ramanujan's poetry, which deserves to be mentioned, is his use of the narrative mode to portray the nuances of particular experiences. The experience of the poet is introduced in the poem usually through a simple and reflective statement, which subsequently grows into an image delineating a detailed description through visual and auditory specifications. Some critics are of the opinion that this mode of writing is probably the result of the Tamil influence on him. To quote Chirantan Kulshreshtha:

The authentic Voice of the poet, his true "Language"..... does not solely depend upon the tongue which he chooses to express himself: the landscapes, the personae, the appropriate moods, all become a language within language. Like a native speaker, he makes "infinite use of finite means", to say with familiar words what has never been said before; he can say exactly what he wants to, without even being aware of the ground-rules of his grammar.<sup>57</sup>

His poetic technique themes and stylistic devices of Kannad and Tamil Literatures are harmoniously blended. The classical tone in these media of Literature inspires him to maintain a sense of history, precision

and accuracy, whether in the evoking of an idea or emotion or in giving picturesque descriptions of an object or place. Speaking of the indomitable influence of Indian Literature on Ramanujan, Bruce King opines: Ramanujan's poems have a high degree of inter-textuality with Indian Literature.<sup>58</sup>

Most of Ramanujan's poems do have an Indian significance attached to them, directly or unobtrusively. His poems are, however, different from those of Ezekiel or Moraes. According to Bruce King:

The echoes are similar to the echoes in the poetry of T. S. Eliot in bringing the resonances of a cultural tradition to bear on the words.<sup>59</sup>

Ramanujan has not placed a barrier between his knowledge of native vernaculars and that of the alien English Language. They are harmoniously synchronised in his personality. Each has exerted a positive influence on the other. In an interview with Rama Jha Ramanujan himself asserts:

..... my English has affected my knowledge of Indian languages, and my knowledge of Indian Languages has affected my English Language.<sup>60</sup>

In Indian poetics, the real talent of the poet lies in what Mathew Arnold regards that a poet should use the touch stone method. This method is used freely the rich store of tradition. Poetry in Indian poetics is not merely an intellectual pursuit. The interpretation of poetry as appealing to the emotions by means of the imagination is common even to the critics of English Literature. Ramanujan in the entire bulk of his poetry uses the symbols of house, snake, river and other childhood signifiers by which he calls back the memories of the past. As a linguist he too often works on the oblique manner of poetry, and more especially in Hindu poems for he reveals his cognized mode of the past and cringes for the future.

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# **CHAPTER – 4**

## ***TEXTURE OF MEANING***

## TEXTURE OF MEANING

Ramanujan as a linguist uses the words which carry manifolds of meaning. The surfacial analysis of his poems provide the meaning of the words only while the substantial meaning of his poetry reveals a deeper vision which can be defined as the objective delineation of human emotions. Among Indian thinkers, Bharthari is the first thinker who works the linguistic interpretation of words (*sabda sakti*) in order to realize the effect of the poetic language in the composition of a poet. The grammarians generally defined "poetry as a unity (*Sahitya*) of *sabda* (expression) and *artha* (significance)"<sup>1</sup>

The theories of *Rasa* and *Dhvani* without merging with each other hardly provide any essence of the emotive contents in the poetic composition. The problem of meaning came to the systematic solution only when Anandavardhana analysed them in his treatise *Dhvanyaloka*. It was only them that poetics in India came to be raised to the rank of Aesthetics. The poetic language is something different from the language of *sastra* (science). Naturally all the possible meanings in daily discourse and scientific writing viz, the informative/ literal secondary /metaphoric and the affective/emotive, were not only included, but imaginatively coloured so as to become aesthetic in their illustrations of *arthalankara(s)*: According to Anandavardhana:

Svabhavokti or sensitive description of nature as it is, can be termed *alankara* only by way of exception; and emotional states (*cittavrtti(s)*) become only when they are *rasa*, i.e. when they have undergone imaginative transfiguration.<sup>2</sup>

In the poetry of A.K.Ramanujan, the power of the word can be analysed through the sabda-sakti if Indian poetics such as *abhidha* (primary power), *Laksana* (indicatory power) and *vyanjana* (suggestive power). Ramanujan's poems bear on the linguistic depth. His social vision can only be given the right texture of meaning, when it is to be decoded linguistically. For example, in his famous poem '*Two Styles in Love*' the range of his imagination surpasses theory comprehension of the conventional meaning (*abhidha*) "Love you are green only to grow yellow".<sup>3</sup>

The colour imagery bearing the witness of "green" and "yellow", becomes symbolic of two things: the beginning enthusiasm in love and its maturity to come to the fruition. Once again the yellow becomes suggestive of its repenting condition. The level of criticism should be imitative. The Indian poetics assigns some definitive roles for judging the work of art:

The artist is to be equipped to deal with all levels of people of *pundita* (the scholar) *bhakta* (the devotee), *rasika* (the critic), *acarya* (the teacher), and *alpabuddhijana* (The common man). It is important to remember that in the truly great Indian works of art there are no private symbols, personal idiosyncrasies and personal value patterns which the reader or beholder is called upon to decipher and since there are shared assumptions enjoyment of the work that is, to those who share the tradition, should be easier than in much in western art and literature.<sup>4</sup>

The analysis of the poem "*Two Styles in Love*" brings the Eastern and the Western mode together.

It is only in the realm of imagination, that is,in fairy tales that the flames of love do not diminish. Thus he writes "in fairy tales, men manage

to love."<sup>5</sup> In the second part of the same poem, the poet speaks of the growing fulfilment of love. In fact, the initial fervour of love is a foreshadow of the ripening maturity that is to come later. Unless the crop grows to its full ear it is not possible to reap in a rich harvest. Similarly, love can attain its fulfillment only with the passage of years.

Love, only green has a fall of  
yellow/hours.

Only growing has gold to reap.<sup>6</sup>

The poet goes on to say that love is not what one reads about in fairy stories where after the bitter comes the sweet and the story concludes with the ringing of the wedding bells and the lovers living happily ever after.

Love is no hurry, love is no  
burning;  
It is no fairy tale of bitter and  
Sweet.<sup>7</sup>

Love is not a sudden upsurge of emotion. It is a gradual process taking time to blossom. Couples in love take time to shed off their inhibitions before entering into a physical relationship. They need to discover each other before discovering the realm of sensual pleasure. Thus, the poet writes:

No, no love is sudden,  
Coupling hands take time to  
kill the frost  
Even leaping beast shall wait to be  
bidden by Beauty.  
Come lightly, love, let us wait-  
to be found, to be lost.<sup>8</sup>

The poet makes use of colour symbolism in this poem. The colour green is used to denote youthful love while yellow signifies mature love.

Love, being a dominant emotion, the poet discusses all its aspects in great detail. In the poem entitled Love-'2': What He said groping'(dated 1990), he talks of the pain of one-sided love. According to the poet, the condition of such a lover is very pathetic. It is similar to that of a man who loses his spectacles in a crowded village fair and does not know the local dialect. His condition is as traumatic as of him who wakes up one fine morning and finds that he is bereft of his fingers. He appears to be drugged and for him the world moves at a very slow pace.

Loving some  
not in love  
is to lose one's glasses  
underfoot without a language  
in a village  
fair, to wake up without  
fingers,  
to drug the heart  
and slow down a world.<sup>9</sup>

It is true that most of Ramanujan's poems are based on imagery drawn from real life. However, along with this pre-eminent streak of realism, the philosophical element is also quite obvious in Ramanujan's poetry. Very often, he talks of issues pertaining to the higher level of consciousness in a matter of fact tone.

In the poem "Blind Spots", the poet talks of the limitations of our sensory organs. Eyes, ears, hands and noses can perform wonderful functions but cannot go beyond a certain limit. Eyes for example, can follow the flight of a bird as long as it remains within the periphery of one's vision. One loses track of the soaring bird when it flies out of sight.

Eyes cannot follow  
a bird

over the hill.<sup>10</sup>

Like the visual, the power of the auditory too is restricted. One can trace the origin of mundane sounds but not the ones nature chooses not to reveal. The sounds produced by the blowing of a whistle or the turning of a wheel are easily heard but not the rustling of grass.

Ears hear a whistle,  
a wheel,  
but not the grass.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, hands can reach after a worldly thing but not the unworldly. The tactile can feel the tangible but not the abstract. Hands can feel the touch of the body but not the unspoken thoughts of the mind. Hands can ruffle through curly hair but cannot tread on what goes on in the minds of the lovers.

but not a thought  
in the air  
read between lovers.<sup>12</sup>

The nose is quick to detect any kind of smell, be it the fragrance of flowers or the pungent odour of some thing burnt. But it lacks the power to detect fear.

Noses know when anything burns  
anywhere but cannot  
learn the smell of fear.<sup>13</sup>

In a aforementioned poem, the poet draws the reader's attention to the fact that the power of the sense organs is not unlimited. They are unable to function beyond a certain extent. They are not able to unravel all the secrets of nature.

Feeling anxious has almost become a second nature of the modern man. One can hardly free oneself from the grip of worry and tension. The stress of living has crept into the works of most of the present day writers

and Ramanujan too is not left untouched. Though primarily a detached observer, he is aware of the nature of anxiety. Thus, in the poem 'Anxiety', the poet denotes the various characteristics of mental tension.

Anxiety does not follow a single track. It spreads its tentacles far and wide. It is more troublesome than fear. One is afraid of something in particular but one may be anxious about many things. Unlike fear which proceeds in one direction only, anxiety can spread in various directions.

Not branchless as the fear tree,  
it has naked roots and secret twigs.<sup>14</sup>

Comparing and contrasting it with hope, the poet says that unlike hope, anxiety does not have a definite shape. Anxiety can take different turns at various stages. It encompasses many complexities within its manifold. The difficulties arising out of anxiety surmount as a complicated whole. Thus, the poet says.

Not geometric as the parabolas  
of hope, it has loose ends  
with a knot at the top  
that's me.<sup>15</sup>

Anxiety has a blurred visage. Wriggling like a snake it clouds the surface of the mind, obstructing the free flow of thoughts.

Not wakeful in its white snake  
glassy ways like the eloping  
gaiety of waters,  
it drowses, viscous and fibred and  
as pitch.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, after having explained the nature of anxiety through various implied comparisons, the poet concludes that "anxiety can find no metaphor to end it."<sup>17</sup>

Linguistically, the potency of words signifies not only the conventional meaning, but it also brings into being indicative and suggestive meanings. Bharthari, the best exponent of revealing the powers of the words, has propounded the theory of "*sphota*" ("burst"). It is primary a concept of semantic and at the same semiotic theory, According to this theory, the meaning, in poetry is revealed in a flash by the *whole* and the indivisible aspects of speech. This is an aspect which shows the Characteristics of syllables and sounds;

Since words can have meaning only in the context of a sentence, the *sphota* of the sentence as a whole should be regarded as the revealer of meaning. This involves recognition of the revealing potency in the whole sphota-aspect of words and sentences..... The revealer of meaning is thus the semantic aspect of *sabda* and the revealer of this in turn is its own linguistic aspect.<sup>18</sup>

If some one analyses the poems of Ramanujan only on the basis their conventional meaning they cannot bring forth the real and suggestive meanings of his poetic contents. Fear and anxiety are the two terms which are enter related with the contextual and situational realities for example:

For you, fear  
is terror  
wound museums  
of Hiroshima  
the smell  
of cooking  
in Dacca sewers,  
Madame Nhu's  
Buddhist barbecues;  
That well-known child

is napalm flames

with x-ray bones

running-running

a stationery march

in the rods

and cones

of everyone's

Reuter eyes.<sup>19</sup>

The images 'Wound Museums of Hiroshima", "The Smell of Cooking", "Buddhist Barbecues", "Napalm Flames", "X-Ray Bones", and "Reuter Eyes" are semantic and semiotic both. The word power used in these images brings forth the denotative and suggestive meaning together. Apart from the linguistic improvisation these images also reflect the situational and the contextual referents and these referents become suggestive for showing the barbarism of man against man. They leave a special message to be followed in times to come.

The seems to suggest the utility of life in comparison of death. In his poem "Obituary" the poet speaks of his father's death and his narrative becomes fully Indian. For example:

Father when he passed on,

left dust

on a table full of papers

left debts and daughters,

a bed wetting grandson

named by the toss

of a coin after him

.....

And he left us

a changed mother

and more than  
one annual ritual<sup>20</sup>

The phrases "a changed mother" and "one annual ritual", are ironic and sarcastic which at same time suggest the realistic tone of the poet. Similarly the poet mocks at history and traditional rituals too. He makes fun of history in "Some Indian Uses of History on a Rainy Day". He portrays the picture of a Sanskrit Professor, lost in Berlin.

In "Entries for a Catalogue of Fears"; the poet discusses the paradoxical emotions of hope and fear. He feels that there cannot exist a clear demarcation between hope and fear. The face of a person overlooking a house which is in flames reflects both fear and hope. Realising the desperate situation he or she is trapped in, the person is frightened out of his or her wits. At the same time, as long as there is even a slim chance of escape, the person clutches on to the last straw of hope. Thus, the face betrays both hope and fear. Dwelling on the inherent differences between fear and hope, the poet realises that fear is a more well defined concept when compared to hope. According to him, fear is "born blind". In other words, it cannot always rationalise.

However, its other sense organs are extremely alert. These organs almost make up for its loss of sight. Fear is firmly rooted in its place and does not have to fumble in the dark. So, he writes:

Though I cannot always tell a fear  
from a hope or a hope from a face  
in the window  
of a house on fire,  
I know  
fears are more precise  
than any hope.

Born blind, a whole skin listening and a seeing ear,

they do not have to grope.<sup>21</sup>

The poet goes on to describe various kinds of fears-the fear of sinking into depths or falling from a height or other mundane but varied fears:

Add now, at thirty nine, to the old  
old fear  
of depths and heights.<sup>22</sup>

Pain in another subject that has been touched by Ramanujan in his poetry. He talks of both physical and mental pain. Both can be acute and equally traumatic in nature.

In the poem entitled "Pain", the poet discusses at great length an acute ankle pain. The pain is so sever that even nerves throb continually;

Pains in my ankle flicker, nerve ends glower and dim like  
cigarette ends in a chain smoker's mouth night and day.<sup>23</sup>

Doctors prescribe an elaborate process of treatment and the patient is compelled to undergo a series of medical tests but to no avail. The poet persona makes use of unusual imagery like that of police files and age old fossils in order to bring home the point that the foot had been scrutinised carefully and thoroughly. Samples of his blood were examined and the X-ray of the foot was projected on the "Computer Screen". Not only this but various doctors came to study the afflicted foot but were unable to detect the problem, let alone cure it:

Doctors X-ray the foot, front face  
and back  
left profile and right as if for a  
police,  
file; unearth shadow fossils of  
neanderthals  
buried in this contemporary foot;

the draw three test tubes of blood  
as I turn  
my face away,

.....

Men and women of different races  
and sizes in white smocks look  
at the dots  
and shake their heads.<sup>24</sup>

The persona of the poem continues to suffer from pain. At frequent intervals, a burning coal is pressed against his ankle to locate a crucial nerve:

The pain in the ankle glowers on a red-hot  
coal pressed now and then against a  
nerve  
nobody can find.<sup>25</sup>

At one point, the pain becomes so unbearable that he implores upon the supernatural to relieve him from suffering. He begs the omnipotent God to come to his aid. He also believes that a mother even without a formal degree in medicine, has the capacity to alleviate the pain which the learned doctors have been unable to do:

O God of know ledge, busy wizard,  
of diagnosis, father of needles, dials,  
and test tubes, send your old companion  
here,  
that mother of mothers, goddess though  
of ignorance,  
send her soon so she can kill away  
my pain  
as she has always done.<sup>26</sup>

In the poem "Pain": trying to find a metaphor, the poet talks of the agony resulting from acid rain. The term 'acid rain' refers to rain containing acid formed from industrial waste in the atmosphere. This result in the formation of cysts and blisters on the skin which is very painful. The poet writes:

I never knew I could bear pain.  
But then I never knew about acid  
rain. A nerve in the vice of a cyst  
in the bone, a growth like a bonsai  
tree  
spreading like smoke in the  
mist of an X-ray,  
Vague as a face in a corridor  
on fire.<sup>27</sup>

Apart from bodily pain, Ramanujan also talks of the trauma of emotional pain. "Pain" is a very short poem on the subject. According to Ramanujan, when one voices one's pain one gets sympathy from others. One often ridicules ones sorrow and is unlike poets who give vent to their grief in the form of a poem. The poem runs as follows:

When a man speaks  
of pain, he gains merit  
if he can speak with irony  
and does not move on then  
to do what poets  
do i.e. make a poem.<sup>28</sup>

Here, Ramanujan speaks that pain in a down to earth manner. There is no tendency to wallow in self pity or glorify grief, nor does he sport an escapist's attitude. On the one hand, he does not brood over melancholy while on the other, he does not philosophise on pain as a distant emotion

touching others but not himself. He accepts pain both physical and mental, as an indispensable part of life.

Closely related to pain is entitled "Despair". It is a short poem where in the poet, very summarily, puts down his concept of despair. According to him, despair is a common phenomenon engulfing all living creatures. Even trees are not spared.

It is akin to an illness. However people should not plunge deep in it or worry about it affects all and sundry. One should learn to take it in one's stride:

Just comb your hair

You shouldn't worry about Despair.

Despair is a strange disease.

I think it happens even to trees.<sup>29</sup>

In his attempt to write poems on abstract themes as well as on the material, Ramanujan does not forget to write on desires. In the poem "One, Two, May be. Three, Arguments against suicide", he vehemently discourages the act of committing Suicide. In the last part of the same poem, he comments:

Desire, bodiless, is endless.<sup>30</sup>

Here, through the image of sensuality, the poet talks of desires in a broad spectrum. There is absolutely no end to desire. While speaking of the carnal instincts in man, he refers to the scriptures of Hindu mythology. The Holy books advise one to keep all physical desires firmly under leash:

Remember what the wise callous

hindu

Said when the love god burned:

Keep your cool,

make for love's sake no noble gesture.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, in order to maintain the sanctity of love, one should be careful not to be swept off by the tide of passion.

That Ramanujan is a poet who likes to call a spade a spade is evident from the fact that many of his poems are based on realistic observations. In the poem, "After Meeting a Celebrity" the poet talks of the fuss made over the visit of a celebrity figure. One may experience immense excitement at this but it is not of any consequence to the celebrity. It is hardly possible for a dignitary to retain a particular meeting in his memory. It is a red lettered day for the one meeting the famous personality and not vice versa:

I will pass from his mind  
as image from a mirror.

Then why was I so clever?<sup>32</sup>

Hypocrisy or pretension is dealt by Ramanujan very succinctly in a short poem entitled "Lies". A new born baby is associated with tender beauty but this is far from the truth. Infact, a baby just born, before being washed, presents a repulsive sight. But people praise it as a picture of loveliness:

The new born was ugly, moist  
hairy all over like a wet rat:  
every visitor said  
she was a beauty,  
had her mother's eyes.<sup>33</sup>

In the next continuity of the texture of meaning in the poetry of A.K. Ramanujan there comes the theory of time and space. The theory of time and space becomes a tool with him for internationalizing the process of culture and certain other anthropological issues. Through his memories, he combines the East and the West for the philosophic dimension of culture. Plato in his *Republic* and *Laws* asserts human freedom but he also remarks that man is the play thing of God.

Virgil the Roman poet supports the Homeric doctrine of man's destiny. Even Gods are subjected to the decrees of fate. Spinoza is a stout champion of fate. Hobbes, Locke and Hume also supports the contention of Spinoza and Liebinitz.<sup>34</sup>

The concept of fate is indirectly related with the concept of time and space. This is due to the fact that playing on memories revives the *bhutkala* (time past) and that is linked with time present. Even the puranas, the concept fate as Kala (time) is repeatedly stressed.

The Epics and the Puranas exact Kala (time), as the - ultimate cause of universe. Brahma is also consumed by Kala(time).The Puranas and the Epics conceive Kala as Daiva or fate. Fate leads the willing but compels or literally drags the unwilling. Fate has been treated as a powerful force in the texts of the western religion and philosophy also.<sup>35</sup>

The textural pattern in the composition of A.K.Ramanujan can be understood only when one understands his method of composition. The poem *Turning Around* an inclusion in *The Black Hen* in *Collected Poems*, becomes a wonderful example for sealing the long passage of time. The flock of sheep inside it are the real sheep in Pahalgam, Kashmir, in 1972. The collection of the sheep under a tree conjoins their before taken to the slaughter house. Their prescient sense of doom and their recognition of immanent extinction form a sort of impenetrable heavy air around them like a mountain mist. "The sheep could easily have been people. The haunting moment was palpable."<sup>36</sup> The same sheep visits his mind after nineteen years and he puts up the question thus:

But what am I to this herd  
of Indian sheep to be fed  
and sheared or  
Slaughtered, or to this man  
who she shares a throaty cry  
with his father.  
and his father's father,  
his cousins and enemies  
for miles around?<sup>37</sup>

As in "Invisible Bodies" one notices that the displaced man, the visitor, a seer of the other's life a person apart, finds himself among disparate images, and sees connections. As poet, he can connect by making metaphoric or metonymic leaps. This is a self-sustaining act. It needs no fuel, but it fuels the creativity of the poet. In an interview with A.L.Becker and Keith Taylor, Ramanujan accepts the following facts related to his vision of time, space and memories. He has shown his interest in folktales, because the folk motifs combine all the three objects into one:

That was my other interest in the folktales. I feel that they were told early enough to children to be important. There are three things in which I'm constantly interested-the aesthetics, the past and the world view. All three of them are important in these tales, even more in these tales than in the mythologies. In the mythologies one hears the official views.<sup>38</sup>

In the entire gamut of the texture of meanings in the poetry of Ramanujan there arises constantly the question of aesthetic experience.

The reason of this question is that writing and speaking are merely external acts which go side by side with enjoying aesthetic experience. Aesthetic bliss is primarily concerned with the internal emotions of the poet

or the *Sahrdaya*, and therefore, the act of writing or speaking does not hamper the emotions converting into *rasa*. If Indian Poetics places the poet and the *Sahrdaya* both on the same footing it because it acknowledges the fact that "the aesthetic experience is common to both, but while the poet is endowed with the divine power of expressing his emotions verbally or in writing the *Sahrdaya* lacks in endowed with this faculty any *Sahrdaya* can earn the title of the poet."<sup>39</sup>

The poet's aesthetic experience may be seriously affected by his concern to choose proper words. But this does not apply to the accomplished poets, because they are never wanting in choice expressions, as there are at their finger-ends and come in quick succession. And in the case of other poets, their aesthetic experience is no doubt interrupted for that duration when in their quest of suitable expressions they have to wait for a while. But this interruption is just like that of a reader when he does not understand a passage in a poem, or like that of a spectator when he fails to apprehend or appreciate a scene in a drama or poetry. Yet it is quite clear that before and after this situation a poet continues to experience "रसानुभूति" (aesthetic delight as other *sahrdayas* do).

The sahridaya can understand the objective co relationship of different ideas in the poetry of A.K.Ramanujan. His famous poem "Elements of Composition" brings the facts of cyclic time, time and the displacement of being from his root. Acknowledging his composition with "father's seed and mother's egg" the poet becomes a serious reporter about the other facts of life. The clock time goes into memory and the poet becomes nostalgic; he comes to India as a boy form America through imagination and reports:

a woman's picture in their wallets;  
and the lappers of Madurai  
male, female, married

with children  
lion faces, crabs for claws,  
clotted on their shadows  
under the stone eyed.<sup>40</sup>

The images such as the "children with lion-faces", who wait for another comparison "crabs for claws". The "crab" as an insect of multiple cells is being compared the low mimetic condition of children at Madurai. The cognized mode of the poet at an early age gets an objective correlation ship with his perception at America, and he thus invites a similarity between the child at Madurai and the sea insect with its multiple cells. These images become wonderful examples of *Vakrokti* (an oblique expression). They have been shown as the "stone-eyed." creatures, knowing no way to their future action. Again, the scene from Madurai shifts to America and the theoretically, the poet links his own fate-the fate that finally determines his own existence.

The arousal of *rasa* with its sthayins occurs with the dominance of the scenes and situation in which a man lives. There must be some *Laukika Karnas* (worldly emotional reasons) for its arousal:

In every day life these emotions are evoked by (i) causes (Karnas) such as surroundings, the object of emotion, (ii) effects (Karya) such as physical reactions brought forth by emotions and (iii) accompanying mental states (*sancaribhavas*). In literature, the same causes, effects and subordinate mental states are called vibhavas, anubhavas and vyabhicaribhavas respectively. And when an emotion is evoked by the representation of these vibhavas and so forth, it is called rasa.<sup>41</sup>

Constantly brooding over the childhood happenings, the range of emotions in the mind of the poet surpasses the mental states of other and he finally merges his own carings related to his existence while staying in America. The last lines of the "Elements of Composition" become symbolic and Suggestive of the inner most pangs of the poet:

and even as I add,  
I lose, decompose  
into my elements,  
into other names and forms  
past and passing, tenses  
without -time  
Caterpillar on a leaf, eating  
being eaten.<sup>42</sup>

The images of "Caterpillar" and the process of "decomposition" bring yet the post structural viewpoints of the poet.

He has got the process of decomposition. But the question arises what kind of decomposition is this the poet speaks of. It is certainly the decomposition of the colonial postcolonial perceptions he witnesses them during his stay at America. The poem, "The Black Hen" brings the same psychological process into being obliquely:

It must come as leaves  
to a tree  
or not at all  
yet it comes sometimes  
as the black hen  
with red round eye  
on the embroidery  
stitch by stitch  
dropped and found again

and when it's all there  
the black hen stares  
with its round red eye  
and you are afraid.<sup>43</sup>

In *Indian Poetics* the theory of *Vakrokti* defines the usage of such words which depict the situational and the contextual reality:

Kuntaka vehemently opposed the naming of different *ritis* on the basis of geographical localities, saying that *ritis* were not peculiarities of any region like marriage between cousins. He was also opposed to considering certain *ritis* as inherently superior and certain as inferior. If any *riti* were inferiors, why deal with it at all in a criticism of poetry.

*Riti* too is born of *kavyavyapara* and a particular *riti* could be more appropriate to a given situation than other.<sup>44</sup>

Strictly according to this definition the metaphor of "Black Hen" justifies the title of the poem. The poet brings forth the colonial reaction living in a European country. The existence of a man is not better than the black hen.

In 'This Pair', the poet compares and contrasts two couples- one with child and the other without a child. The pair without children presents a picture of elegance and sophistication while the other couple looks care worn and poorly dressed:

The envy of the elegant,  
Childless couple, and the virgin aunt,  
this fertile shabby pair  
faintly smell of already unwashed hair,  
worry about cash  
and that powder they use for diaper rash

on certain fundamental places.<sup>45</sup>

The proud parents are envied by the 'Childless Couple' and the spinster aunt. But along with the blessing of the child, they also woo other problems, the foremost among them being the cost of upbringing a child. They are also constantly concerned about the well being of the child and in the process neglect themselves. Nevertheless, they have willingly decided to brave all odds for the sake of a child who is delivered and made presentable by the deft hands of a doctor:

they seem to have traded,  
without any discount, for that thing  
hardly kneaded  
into human shape by some obstetric  
stranger.<sup>46</sup>

By making use of a common place image, Ramanujan talks about the serious and the deep. In the first stanza of the poem, 'Shadows', he says that a shadow is cast when one walks in the sunlight. Shadows cannot be formed unless something poses an obstruction in the way of light. While light is a pre-requisite for the formation of shadows, doubts take birth in darkness. Doubts have a tendency to grow fast and no sooner do the seeds of doubt begin to take root than the complete mind is caught in the web of uncertainty. Just as the vines extend their trailing creepers over the entire window, the branches of doubt spread out clouding the vision of the mind. So, the poet writes:

Shadows fall between people  
When they walk in the Sun.  
  
Doubts grow in the Sun  
and by dawn the window  
is tangled in vines.<sup>47</sup>

In the next stanza of the same poem, the poet draws one's attention to the fact that the inevitable cannot be stopped. Traditionally, the scaffolding was a platform used for the execution of a criminal. Using the twin images of a scaffolding and a tall tower, he says that one is swallowed by death when one runs out of time on earth. Similarly, with the passage of time, moss grows on the barks of trees and with the advent of old age, wrinkles appear on the face. In the same way, it is not possible to stop men from accidentally treading on land mines leading to an explosion and consequently death:

Scaffolding grid the steeple

when time's work is done.

Moss grows on the bask

of the Oak, wrinkles on a brow,

as men explode stepping on mines.<sup>48</sup>

The poet proceeds to present a picture of familiar rituals in India. Tree worship is widely prevalent in India since time immemorial. It is not a rare sight to see devout women binding the peepul tree with sacred thread and then moving round it in a circular motion, earnestly praying for a son. The poet does not forget to mention the plight of daughters too. The freedom of the daughters is greatly curbed by the restrictions imposed on them. Their condition is compared to the trees thirsting for rains:

Women circumambulate the peepul

tree hoping for a Son.

Daughters breed in stark

family dungeons like slow.

perennials waiting for the rain.<sup>49</sup>

In the last stanza, the poet describes the glorious return to soldiers who return triumphant from a war. Their victory in the battle compensates for their obnoxious behaviour back home:

War heroes return in special trains  
Covered with blood and flags. They blow  
bugles at home, brawl in pubs,  
and bark  
Orders at dogs, kill and flay twenty-one  
nurses and hang one from a maple.<sup>50</sup>

'Traces' is a poem dealing with terrestrial and extra-terrestrial elements. The poet reflects on the stars, oceans and the imprints of time. In the opening stanza of the poem, he says that the planets have their own galaxies which are merely interpreted as groups of stars. It is only the earth's own constellation of stars that is known as the Milky Way Galaxy. The poet refers to the widely prevalent belief of man's fate being controlled by the positions of planets and stars. Astrologically, the seven stars in the sky are interpreted as seven saints overlooking mankind from above:

The stars are constellations  
only to an eye light years away.  
They do not even belong  
to the same time or galaxy  
except on the earth.  
that reads its fate in the Seven  
Sages and the Milky Way.<sup>51</sup>

The poet goes on to describe the immense role played by oceans. These large water bodies surround the earth giving rise to continents, beaches and harbours. The lure people to come and shake off their fatigue and rejuvenate themselves. They provide a pathway for ships to sail across it. Submarines traverse through oceans in order to explore the under-water kingdom. An ocean provides home to countless sea animals including whales sharks and dolphins.

The moon causes high and low tides on the bed of the ocean. The poet not only talks of the geographical and scientific benefits of the ocean but many books have also been based on the ocean. The story of "The Tempest" thrived on a deserted island by the side of an ocean while Moby Dick was the name of a blue whale who lived in the ocean. Similarly, 'Robinson Crusoe' tells about the adventures of a sailor who found himself stranded on a lonely island by the sea.

Oceans swirl around earthlings  
giving them shores, beaches, marinas,  
vacations, continents, harbours,  
ships and submarines, under sea  
kingdoms, whale song, moon tides,  
The Tempest, Moby Dick,  
and Robinson Crusoe.<sup>52</sup>

In the last stanza, the poet talks of the miscellaneous things carefully preserved in the bosom of the earth since the beginning of time. These objects may be as widely divergent as the imprint of a seed, a shell, a leaf suppressed beneath the layers of clay, or the bones and skulls of animals. They have been patiently waiting for ages to be discovered and studied in order to add a page in the history of mankind:

The earth itself has layers of time, Shelves of fossils that carry traces of anything that will leave a trace, like seed, shell, a leaf pressed on clay, wing bone and cowskull, waiting for people to decipher and give themselves a past and a family tree.<sup>53</sup>

Most of Ramanujan's poems are based on recollections of the past. However, he is unique in his treatment of memory. Usually, poets have assigned a place of honour to memory and endowed it with a generous measure of sentimentality. But Ramanujan seems to be an exception.

According to him, memory acts as the store house of the mundane things of life. He can vividly recall the nursery rhymes learnt in infancy, the historical details crammed in school, the 'Cosmetic' uses of metals or the dress code popular during the time of Shakespeare:

Ask me:

nursery rhymes

On Tipu Sultan or Jack and Jill

the cosmetic use of gold when

the Guptas ruled:

an item of Costume in

Shakespearean times.<sup>54</sup>

But the poet does not regard memory as a source of sustenance. He can only recall some common place incident or the facts that he had memorized but his memory does not aid him in remembering faces or conversation:-

But not

For all my blood-beat

nor the drill of that wood pecker beak

my will,

Can I hold or keep

one face

and those words random thrown

in a tumble of your multiple faces

as

they turn in this day's dazzle

this sun struck house of mirrors.<sup>55</sup>

Ever since the dawn of civilization, man has always been fascinated by the phenomena of life and death. They have always been regarded as thought provoking issues. Poets, being more sensitive than the ordinary

layman, have reflected deeply on the concepts of life and death. They have always appealed to the modern sensibility and Ramanujan being a present day poet is no exception.

In the poem 'Birthdays', he dwells deeply on life and death. Since they are inevitable parts of existence, birthdays and death anniversaries come at regular intervals. Just as birthdays of the younger relatives are celebrated with zeal and fervour; similarly, death anniversaries are also remembered with equal reverence:

Birthdays come and go  
for brother son, daughter,  
Spouse, niece and nephew,  
and among them, mine and as I grow  
older, they come as often as death  
anniversaries in all the families  
I know  
and they linger under tamarind  
trees like other absences.<sup>56</sup>

Not only are birthdays remembered in case of human beings but even institutions and museums have their specific foundation day celebrations. Not only this, but the age of a tree too can be calculated and with each passing year, it grows older:

Even universities,  
art museums, apple trees  
that recycle the seasons,  
and inventions like guns  
have their birthdays  
like St. Francis, Shakespeare,  
Gandhi and Washington  
marked on Calendars.<sup>57</sup>

The great men have their birthdays marked as red lettered days on calendars but it is not to say that the common man has no knowledge of his birthday.

Even the date for a particular invention is commemorated. Then the poet proceeds to distinguish between 'birth pangs' and 'death throes'. Like birth, death is not necessarily a long and complicated process. Birth of an individual is singular in nature while death of any living creature, say, a pregnant mother (human or animal) implies more than one death:

Birth takes along time  
though death can be sudden,  
and multiple, like pregnant deer  
shot down on the run.<sup>58</sup>

There are other differences too. In case of birth, preparation begins months before hand. As the foetus gradually grows in the mother's womb, it begins to kick the walls of the stomach. But death does not announce its arrival: One caught in the jaws of death makes no wilful exercise of one's limbs:

Yet one would like to think,  
one kicks and grabs the air  
in death throes as a baby  
does in its mother's womb  
months before the event.<sup>59</sup>

There are many other dis-similarities between birth and death. While birth calls for celebration, death is an occasion for mourning: Birth is associated with creation while death denotes dispersal of elemental energies:

Birth seems quite special  
every time a mayfly is born

into the many miracles  
of day, night and twilight,  
but death? is it a dispersal  
of gathered energies  
back into their elements,  
earth, air, water, and fire,  
a reworking into other moulds,  
grass, worm, bacterial glow  
lights, and mother-matter  
for other off-spring with names  
and forms clocked into seasons?<sup>60</sup>

The poet interprets the human body not last forever. It will be subject to death and decay. As it draws its last breath, the limbs loosen their hold and the body loses its warmth. The dead body left for a long time shrivels and shrinks in size baring its teeth.

Will one day be short of breath,  
lose its thrust,  
turn cold, dehydrate and leave  
a jawbone with half a grin  
near a pond.<sup>61</sup>

Like one well versed in philosophy the poet contemplates on the final out come of the physical body, be it of man or an animal. Death is the ultimate goal of the body and no one can escape the jaws of death. The poet goes on to describe the procedure followed after death. The corpse is either buried or cremated and the ash thrown in rivers and seas:

Every one in this street  
will become cold, lie under stones  
or be scattered as ash  
in rivers and oceans.<sup>62</sup>

Poets and philosophers down the ages have always been attracted towards the changing nature of time and Ramanujan possessing a philosophical bent of mind naturally glides into this category. In the poem titled 'Sonnet', he realises the continuous influx of time:

Time moves in and out of me  
a stream of sound, a breeze  
an electric current that seeks  
the ground, liquids that transpire  
through my veins, stems and leaves  
toward the skies to make fog and mist  
around the trees. Mornings brown  
into evenings before I turn around  
in the day.<sup>63</sup>

In the mentioned poem, not only time, but also everything in nature seems to be in a state of constant motion. Nothing is really static.

Closely related to the same theme is the poem entitled 'Fog'. Here, the poet not only draws the reader's attention to the nature of time but he also emphasises on the inherent urge for change. Using animal imagery, the poet says that oxen are made to move in a circular motion in the process of extracting mustard oil. The fact underlined here is the continued movement and the change in position:

Stuck in the need to move on,  
eyes turn round and round  
oxen at the oil press.<sup>64</sup>

Change is an eternal Law of Nature. The human body too is subject to the swaying nature of change. The poet then refers to the complete metamorphosis of the repulsive caterpillar to a lovely butterfly. The caterpillar will die in its drowsy stupor unless the pupa metamorphosis into

butterfly. Thus, the poet through varied examples lays stress on the permanent nature of change:

Waiting for change, the body  
Changes, a Chrysalis  
that will rot unless it breaks  
into wings.<sup>65</sup>

Ramanujan's Contemplating abilities enable him to reflect deeply on a wide range of issues. Having written on varied aspects related to humanity, he turns his attention to the animals. He comes to the conclusion that these supposedly inferior creatures actually lead a better existence in some respects than their so called superiors, that is, human beings. First and foremost, animals definitely enjoy greater peace of mind for their lives are not beset with unnecessary tension. The ravages wrought upon by war have no effect on, say, cats but the same cannot be said of people. Then, animals are free from the bond of relationships and their obvious obligations. A dog is not bothered about the well being of its siblings. Unlike human beings, animals are not agonized by the illnesses of their relations. Another enviable quality that the animals are blessed with is the absence of expectations. An animal is not expected to play the role of a bread winner. They are not possessive like men. Hence, they are not traumatised by any breach of trust. Finally, unlike the conscientious human race, animals do not have to live with the stigma of a guilty conscience. While a man is chastised from within for behaving in a dishonorable way, animals are not hounded by a bogeyman inside. In short, the poet feels that since animals do not have to abide by a set code of conduct, they lead a happier existence. In his own words:

Animals bring us tranquility. Cats  
sleep through a war. Dogs ignore  
your sister's

Cancer, forgive betrayals and rations,  
while all morning a man cannot  
bear his own  
betrayal after sleeping with two women.  
But a dog will not mount one bitch  
after  
another nor want to kill himself  
for being a cad.<sup>66</sup>

According to Indian Poetics the art of poetry is the translation of poet's experience. With the help of enchanting phrases and with the help of proper adjustment between sound and sense the poets "transplant his experience into the mind of the refined appreciator. Thus, poetry emanating from the mind of the poet is transplanted further into the mind of the connoisseurs and consequently it owes its existence both to the poet and to the connoisseur"<sup>67</sup> the concept of poetry thus differs from person to person. It also differs from age to age. Ramanujan writes in the later twentieth century, he therefore uses such devise in his poetic craft as to reflect more and more the contemporary sensibility.

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# ***CHAPTER – 5***

## ***APPLICATION TO VAKROKTI THEORY***

## APPLICATION TO VAKROKTI THEORY

Ramanujan as a linguist deals with the oblique nature of presentation in his poetic bulk. This oblique composition brings forth the concept of *Sadharanikarana* or the process of trans personalization of human emotions and finally he comes near to T.S. Eliot's poetic principle of "objective correlative". It would however, be appropriate to discuss in detail about the theory of *Vakrokti* or oblique nature of poetry; for the theory of Vakrokti forms the nucleus in his bulk of poetry. Without the analysis of the Vakrokti theory, the symbols, images and signifiers used in his poetry the essence of his poetry can hardly be interpreted. The propounder of Vakrokti theory is Kuntaka and defines the poetry thus. Following the poetic credo of *Bhama* that poetry is the combination of sound and sense (*Sahitya*). Kuntaka follows this credo of *Bhama* with some definitive changes.

In explaining this, Kuntaka first of all observes that a harmonious blending of sound and sense constitutes poetry. He defines the poetry for the sake of its vision. Improving upon the theory of Bhamah, he defines poetry as: "Word and sense in unison, arranged in a combination shining with strikingness of expression affected by the peculiar skill of the poet and causing delight to the connoisseur of poetic art."<sup>1</sup> The test of Vakrokti is its contribution to *Chamatkara* – the aesthetic enjoyment experienced from a composition. Kuntaka lays down that *Vakrata* is to be perceived in poetic composition in six different aspects. (i) *Varnavinyasa-Vakrata* (Vakrata in the composition of letters). This is meant for including the field of sabdalankara (images); (ii) *Padapurrardha-Vakrata* (Vakrata in the use of nominal stems). This shows that Vakrata in the nominal usage (iii) *Pada-aparadh-Vakrata* (Vakrata in the usage of suffixes); (iv) *Vakya-Vakrata* (Vakrata that includes the range of sentence formation); (v) *Prakarana-*

*Vakrata* (*Vakrata* in the changes made of the incidents selected in a story in the construction of the plot) and (vi) *Prabandha-Vakrata* (in the composition of the entire work as a whole)<sup>2</sup>

The last variety *Padapurvardha-Vakrata* includes two words together. Pada + purrardha, denoting the synthesis of the root, and the artistic deviation based on the substantiative root word. Pada is derived from the root "pada" which means "to go".<sup>3</sup> The word originally denotes a quarter which can also be called four-phased God. And in this sense a fourth part, the word *pada* is used in Sanskrit prosody. Pada thus stands for any one of the four quarters of a verse. The second variety of the term purrardha, denotes the substantive changes in the use of synonyms, homonyms, denotation metaphorical or resemblance-based indication, adjectives or adverbs, compounds or derivatives, verbs and nouns, number or gender "convert or veiled expressions etc."<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the theory of *Vakrokti* refers to linguistic theory of composition. Even the western theory of linguistic brings forth the distinction between the ambiguity ad word meaning, for example, the plural forms of "boys" and "books" denotes the fact that suffix "s" with "boy" transforms the meaning of the root word with its plural marker. The whole complex is nevertheless identified as a single word. One could meet this problem in a fairly traditional way by supposing that in cases like this one has two different kinds of meaning: "lexical" meaning associated with stem "boy" and "grammatical" meaning associated with the plural markers. The definition of a "unit meaning" would then depend on "lexical" rather than on "grammatical" meaning.

The concept of *Sahitya* (literature) in Indian Poetics is based on the total association of the word and its meanings (the lexical and grammatical meanings are included). Kuntaka has brought some modifications in his theory of *Vakrokti*. It is complete harmony and commensurateness between

the expression and the expressed. So, Vakrokti is a quality pertaining to word and idea vying with each other for enhancing the beauty of composition. The concept of "Sahitya" emphasizes that the expression will be neither less nor more charming than the expressed. Then, again, Kuntaka asserts that the alliance to be poetic must have the specialty of being endowed with the quality of *Vakrata* and must be beautiful by the employment of *Marga* or *Riti*, *Guna*, *Alankara Vritti* etc; all of which are comprehended under the same concept of Vakrokti and which also in their turn compete with each other in making the poem beautiful".<sup>5</sup>

Anandavardhana regards *Vyanjana* as the aesthetic motif; but Kuntaka holds that poetic language embraces more aesthetic uses than that of *Vyanjana* and gives his wider concept of *Vakrokti*. Anandavardhana regards that only *Vyapara* (word) can not serve the purpose of aesthetic experience hence he declares that the soul of poetry lies in *Vyanjana Vyapara* (suggestive use of language). Kuntaka on the other hand takes *Vyapara* (linguistic function) involved in the poetry as the direct aesthetic function of the creative poet himself. The very etymology of the word *Kavya* viz *Kaveh Karma* lends him support. And he therefore "sees no difficulty in characterizing his many sided *Vakra-Kavi-Vyapara* as the life or soul of all poetry".<sup>6</sup>

Kuntaka stands unrivalled so far as the judiciousness of criticism is concerned. He removes the contradictions he sees in the *dhvani* theory and though apparently ranged against it. He virtually extends it into his Vakrokti theory. It Anandavardhana regards *gunas* as *Rasa -dharma*, Kuntaka regards them as ingrained in poetic temperament (*Kavi Svabhava*) which shows his psychological insight. What was implicit in Anandavardhana treatment of *pratibha* (creative imagination) is rendered more explicit by a wealth of illustrative examples in Kuntaka. All the varities of *dhvani* are properly explained as the many varities of *Vakrata*.

Thus there emerges a remark about Kuntaka and about his theory of Vakrokti in the following lines:

Kuntaka's Vakrokti is the Indian  
counterpart of the Longinian  
sublime which connotes according to  
Saints bury "all that quality or combination  
of qualities which create enthusiasm in  
'Literature, all that gives consummation to  
it, all that deserves the highest encomium  
either in prose or poetry."<sup>7</sup>

After analysing the fundamental principles of *Vakrokti* theory it seems appropriate now to apply now the linguistic symbolic philosophic and aesthetic principles of *Vakrokti* to the poetic bulk of A.K.Ramanujan.

The persistent theme occurs in the bulk of Ramanujan's poetry becomes important for two aspects: linguistic free play of the phonemes and the expression of oblique vision for realizing the weight of poetic self over individual self. The poems like "Strider," "Towards simplicity" "Death and the Good Citizen", "Saturdays" "Second Sight", "Love Poems" "for a wife and her Tree" and "In March" are based on the oblique expression which shows the application of *Prabandha Vakrata* (Vakrata in the composition of the Poem). The contents of these poems become symbolic of Tattvartha (suggestive meaning). In the series of these poems "Elements of composition" is suigeneris for the relationship of body and nature.

Based on the scientific analysis of human body the poet brings into focus how the composition and de-composition of human body—"father's seed and mother's egg".<sup>8</sup>

The *Prabandha Vakrata* denoting the geneological references to the growth of the poet symbolizes the oblique expression, which becomes a unique instance for the oblique expression. The poet grows together the

nature of human body and the perpetual nature outside human body. Apart from the seed of the father and mother's egg, the natural elements like "earth" "air", "water" and "fire" give existence to human body into " a mulberry mass". He also anatomises the scientific components like "calcium", "carbon", "gold" and "magnesium" for natural and organic growth of human body. In most of the poems of Ramanujan, human body has been compared with the growth of the tree. The comparison and the association of an inorganic element with the organic deals again with the instance of the nominal *Vakrata*.

Sometimes Ramanujan uses such linguistic images and metaphors, which bring into being the apparent paradoxes of images (*alankaras*). Before analysing them in the text of Ramanujan, it seems to understand the principles of *virodhabhava* (Apparent- contradiction).

A figure of speech in which there is an apparent but not real contradiction or incongruity is in appearance. It is of 8 kinds: (i) Incongruity between *genus* (*jati*) and *genus*, (ii) between genus and attribute (*Guna*), (iii) between genus and action (*Kriya*), and between genus and substance (*dravya*) (iv) between attribute and attribute (.v) between attribute and action, and (vi ) between attribute and substance, (vii.) between action and substance (viii) between substance and substance.<sup>9</sup>

The poetic imagination is discernible in the bulk of his poetry and that reveals the principles of contradiction of comparison. With the idea of the growth of the poem of the instance of the tree brings fluctuating emotional changes and artistic deviation shows an instance of *pratikulavarna* (dysophany) or in other the excessive use of harsh syllables. The poem Elements of composition moves for revealing the family of the poet "the look/ of panic on sister's face/ an hour before"<sup>121</sup> of her marriage. As a poet of memory and nostalgia, he remembers his childhood sharing the experience with "lepers in Madurai/male, female married/with

children". The definition of composition makes him aware about his childhood and this process links time past with time present and it also reveals finally the arguments which show *obliquely* the decomposition of human body:

And even as I add,  
I lose, decompose  
into my elements  
into other names and forms  
Past and passing, tenses  
Without time  
Caterpillar on a leaf, eating  
being eaten.<sup>123</sup>

The linguistic free play of merging the body into elements of nature and then forming new names and forms become yet another example of *Pada Purvardha Vakrata* (the contextual obliqueness) and this brings forth the poetic self or the universal elements of the poetry.

"Saturdays", "The Striders" and "Death and Citizen" also brings into being the mechanical nature of human body. The sight of the thin-stemmed water bugs with their "dry capillary legs" is compared with that of a prophet. The poet meditates on a balanced co-ordination between the body and nature. Unlike "Elements of composition" Death and the Good citizen" begins with the first person and reveals obliquely "the dismantlement and destruction of human body"<sup>10</sup> The body with dismantling or de-composing process proves highly synthetic and associative for using varied culture of the world. The oblique expression "my tribe" refers to the inhibitive mind or the Hindu culture of the poet and hence "they will cremate me in Sanskrit and sandalwood "<sup>135</sup>. It is the body which makes the poet compare the funeral rites of different communities of the world. He again remarks:

Or abroad  
they'll lay me in a funeral  
parlour, embalm me in  
Pesticides bury me in steel trap, lock  
me out of nature  
till I'm oxidized be left-  
over air withered by my own  
vapours into grin and bone <sup>136</sup>

The perplexity of the poet lies not in the idea of death, but it lies in his separable ness from the elements of nature for it will never give him any chance as a natural human being to be "moulded and composed for Jasmine, egg plant."<sup>136</sup>

"Second Sight" and "Love Poem for a wife and Her Trees' show the relationship of the body and nature. In' Second Sight' the poet stands in Pascal's endless queue and is addressed as "Hindu": He is treated there as a second rate citizen. Amidst such scenes and situation the process of self-actualization and the idea of self-respect arise in him. The awakening inside his mind strikes" a light to regain/at once my first, and only."<sup>191</sup> "The Love for wife and Her Trees" knits in a serious manner the structure of three kinds of trees. The first kind of tree is linked with the family life of the poet. The poem shows some inner pangs of a linguist who gives up the "diagrams of Dravidian Kinship" and as an anthropologist sits "On a family tree" which is in "topsy turvy" position: "with their roots in heaven/ and branches in earth".<sup>180</sup> Section second of the poem uses metonymic metaphor and compares this kind of tree with "Spinal Chord" in human body; and it represents second kind of tree;

In the safe custody of an antiseptic  
bubble, your spinal chord.

Will Wither- That stem of all senses

that second tree  
with roots at the top, branches branching  
in limb and lung.

Down to toe, hangnail, and finger tip.<sup>181</sup>

The third kind of tree reveals the mythical pattern in this poem through symbolic expression: "Like the Blue Mountain tree in the cuttings/of my garden graft, or its original/sighted at once."<sup>182</sup>

This tree symbolizes deep knowledge of life. The human body is linked again with an apple-a symbolic representation of human body. He pronounces it as "red apple tree", Section IV highlights-a Kafkaesque metamorphosis" for existential pursuits. The instruments for this pursuit are imagination and memory. The importance of body lies when it makes a balanced approach between nature and culture:

Even the Sexton next-door, topless.  
Tree on a temple frieze,  
Or plain Indian wife.  
At the village well, so I can play son,  
Father, brother, macho lover, gaping  
Tourist, and clumsy husband.<sup>183</sup>

The merger of different times (time past and time present) is yet another aspects that becomes leitmotif in Ramanujan's poetry. The body as "mulberry mass" will return to the dust from where it once came into existence. At the instance of T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets, Ramanujan tries to define the linear and spiritual parameters of an invisible yet powerful entity-time.

'Towards Simplicity', 'Time and Time Again' and 'Time to Stop' reveal the modern images, myths and literary allusions for working out the clock time and the time that lies inside human body. The images like "Corpuscle", "Skin, membrane", "minute seasons" begin the structure of

"Towards Simplicity". The vision of the poet broadens when he accomplishes the relationship between nature and culture of human body: Millions grow lean and fall away/ in the hourly autumn of the body."<sup>37</sup> The process of nature and culture becomes "co-extensive" as "spring and autumn." Time, as the chief motif behind all these extensions of nature and culture, rotates around these things:

into the soil we come,  
to find for a while a simplicity  
in larger,  
external seasons.<sup>37</sup>

As an exile, Ramanujan always thinks of his past in America; and in his poetry memory links the various threads of time together. The modernist concept of time is something different from the historic evolution of it. Ramanujan through the psychological device of time based on memory and nostalgia explores the different components of it:

For Ramanujan, memories, which are perceptions that live through time, are a means to explore the nature. Through memories he is not seeking his roots (in the area of darkness) nor is he exploring the wounded or healthy civilization.....Memories, for him are means of self-exploration, self in the abstract, not the specific historical self.<sup>11</sup>

The Poems 'On Memory', 'Time and Time Again', 'Time to stop', 'Fog', 'August', 'At zero', and 'Sonnet' are suggestive of time-linearity and become symbolic of "Co-extension" between body and its nature. Time brings out certain abstract issues in Ramanujan's poetry. 'A Lapse of Memory' links together the division of times into a unified process. The phrase "an amnesic" use of memory becomes indicative of some linear

configurations of time. The ironic mode of the poet brings into being some repellent traits of human psyche:

Mating white and black lizards in school book Sanskrit or  
a slant of rain on the sun shine and the Papaya tree.<sup>76</sup>

Ramanujan becomes a Post-structural writer when he regards history as myth. The historical process of "the cosmetic use of gold" is linked with the skills of modern poetic ideas in "On Memory". He finds an appropriate use of memory for revealing the pulse of time and that also becomes the pulse of human body:

Memory  
in a crowd of memories, seems  
to have no place/at all for unforgettable things.<sup>21</sup>

'Time and Time again' shows the ticking of the clock. The images of "Clock Tower" and "beating their gongs" work out inner realities of human body. If a mechanical clock continues incessantly with its points without any pause, the clock of human body also exploits and deteriorates the life-giving cells in human body. The outer perception and inner realisation are fused together by the image of clock. The perennial feuds and some seasonal alliance are to come to an end: "Of Hindu, Christian and Muslims/cut off sometimes by a change of wind". The poem again reveals an active operation of nature and its relation through human body.

'Through the knocked-out clock work after a riot, a peace-march time bomb or a precise act, of nature in a night of lightening'<sup>64</sup>

'Fog' also exemplifies the notion of time. Based on the intricate fabric of nature and culture, the imagery of 'fog' symbolically links human like with "oxen at the oil press"- a typical Indian usage. Again, the imagery of 'fog' is linked with the moving wheel of time and with the nature of human body:

"Waiting of change, the body/changes, a chrysalis /that  
will rot unless it breaks/into wings"<sup>208</sup>

The outward ticking of the clock reveals the historical "self" of the poet; it also becomes suggestive of the psychological time. The last lines create sensations in human body and mind;

a cold that burns without blisters, pulse ticking off time  
like an umpire over a fallen wrestler<sup>208</sup>

The Poems like 'At zero', "August" and 'Birthdays' Illustrate the process of time. The Poet accounts in these poems, on one hand, the days, months and years, and births, death, marriages, quarrels, divorce on the other. He thus sums up the historic process in relation to time. The Imagery of "spider legs" symbolizes the needle of time and the image of "Wheel" and the "log become symbolic of weaving the cloth to Brahmin widow. Again, the human being can't hear the chattering sound of an on-going wheel, but he can sense only "the movement" of the wheel as a helpless man. The subtle and metaphoric suggestions are worked out in the following lines:

now faint, now clear  
in a blind man's hand:  
at zero, as when the potter saint  
singing hymns, dancing  
his god, kneaded with his feet  
the shift red clay, burying  
alive his youngest child.<sup>201</sup>

In 'August', the poet counts the months of an English Calendar and shows the cyclic process of time, but in 'Birthdays' he brings forth a comparative chart of life and death. The inclusion of nature vis-à-vis the wheel of time becomes a striking point to the reader for time-linearity. The

birthdays of his own family are linked with "tamarind trees." The history is analysed when the poet talks of the birthdays of St. Francis, Shakespeare, Gandhi and Washington. Indian sensibility can be caught and be observed in the subtle distinction between the process of birth and death: "Birth takes a long time/though death can be sudden"(206). Birth symbolisms the growth of leaves on the while death becomes indicative of a dry tree facing the danger of storm. It shows a complete deterioration of elemental bodies. Both death and birth are symbolic of inner panged of human body to say that death throes are birth pangs."<sup>206</sup> The ceremony of birth is regarded as a specific event, but the poet makes it mysterious when he leaves the passage with a question mark:

but death? Is it a dispersal  
of gathered energies  
back into their elements,  
earth, air, water and fire,  
a reworking into other moulds  
grass, worm, bacterial glow  
lights and mother-matter  
for other off spring with names  
and forms clocked into seasons.? <sup>207</sup>

A fusion of biological and geological times raises the intricate fabric of social history. On the pattern of post modernist writer, Ramanujan regards the process of history as mere myth and by this mythic representation of history, he refuses the traditional interpretation of it. The post structural writers reject the age-long interpretation of history:

The writers reject the idea of history as time for its original concepts as myth, the partial recall of the race. For them, history is a fiction, subject to a fitful muse, memory.....In time every event becomes an exertion of

memory and is thus subject to invention. The farther the facts, the more history petrifies into myth. Thus, as we grow older as a race, we grow aware that history is written, that is a kind of literature without morality.<sup>12</sup>

To a post-modern writer, history is simply a "myth", "memory" and "a fitful muse" to be used as serving tools for literature. Many poems of Ramanujan work out the common cultural issues, musings on the guilt and atrocities of man against man and finally a tremendous use of memory as the instruments of literary expression.

In contemporary literature it is believed that literature is not history's other. History serves the purpose to find out such signifiers as to lead to revealing the hidden signs of society and its culture. The poems like "History", "Small Scale Reflection on a Great House" "Bosnia", "Report" "If Eyes Can See", "Some Indian uses of History" and "The Last of Princess" highlight the social history, memory and desire, myths and images in the poetry of Ramanujan. History with its images and metaphors serve the purpose of *alamkaras* for the decoration of ideas into composition. Kuntaka also supports this view in his theory of *Vakrokti*. Prof K. Krishnamoorthy brings the theoretic principles of Kuntaka thus:

It is to the credit of Kuntaka that he  
was the first to formulate it into a  
systematic aesthetic theory. His *Vakrokti*  
is an inevitable and deliberate departure  
from the empirical linguistic mode to achieve  
aesthetic effect. It is a deviation from  
common parlance dictated by the very  
necessities of poetic facts and it is not  
an intellectual but an imaginative  
activity. These basic postulates of

Kuntaka can find many echoes in  
modern aesthetic theories too.<sup>13</sup>

In his use of history for the literary reflections Ramanujan uses such phonemic usages in the form of imagery as to bring into being the oblique nature of poetry. To him history is a subject of change; it is not a static feature of human growth: "History which usually changes slowly/ changes sometimes during a single conversation".<sup>107</sup>

In the poem "History" the polite little aunt changes. The entire poem sketches a historical purview of a family. The use of the first person in the third stanza of the poem is made to show the ageing process of the great aunt and he thus makes a fusion of nature and human body. The images of "diamond ear-rings" "bangles" and the "toe-rings" belonging consciousness or the historical "self" of the poet. This historical self is nothing but the reflection of the cognized made of the poet. The memories become sure way, for revealing the tussle between human nature and culture:

her napkins on/to the great disgust  
of the orthodox widow  
who washed her body/at the end  
and the dark/stone face of my little aunt  
acquire some expression/at last.<sup>108</sup>

In "Some Indian Uses of History" the process of history is woven into a myth by the waiting crowd. The historical time of King Harsha is linked with the mechanical beating of "soft gongs". Literature is not history's other; but history with its usual process becomes literature itself: "the single china man /a hundred pieces of gold/ a pearl/and a length of cloth".<sup>74</sup>

The second section of the poem reflects the Indian sensibility of the poet. Section third that goes back to 1935 reports about the trans cultural issues that are traced through a professor of Sanskrit who lost in the zigzag

way of Berlin streets. The influence of the Western Culture on Professor is discernible in the following lines:

Memorizing a foreign paradigm  
of lanterns, land marks,  
a gothic lotus on the iron gate;  
suddenly comes home  
in English gestures and Sanskrit/ assimilating  
the swastika/ on the neighbour's arm  
in that roaring bus from a grey  
no where to a green.<sup>75</sup>

The symbol of house in "Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House" represents the fate of a nation like India. The poet reveals a comparison between the two kinds of families: traditional and modern: "Sons- in -Law who quite forget/ their mothers but stay in cheek/ accounts or teach arithmetic to nieces."<sup>97</sup> The two kinds of management of economy have been shown again in this poem: the economy of the house and the economy of nation. Social reflection of economic issues and the transitional phase make this poem a representative one for the unity of the nation as a whole:

Who keep them gaping with  
anecdotes of unseen fathers,  
or to bring Ganges water /in a copper pot  
for the last of dying  
ancestors' rattle in the throat.<sup>98</sup>

Two other poems "Report" and "If Eyes Can See", blend the social norms and the historic relation together. Vinay Dharwadkar sums up this fusion of history and society in Ramanujan's poetry thus:

Ramanujan's poetic treatment of historical themes  
parallels and foreshadows his treatment of contemporary  
society and the individual self. We can interpret his social

and personal poetry coherently if we assume that the human drama which constitutes the central dynamic of the past also serves as the mechanism that keeps the present day world constantly in motion.

Both the synchronic and diachronic relationships are maintained in "If Eyes can see". The mood of anxiety and pensiveness also prevails in this poem:" and seer fickleness have crumbled the walls/messed up the children auctioned the picture"<sup>264</sup>; but the last lines of the poem are optimistic and exhibit the mood of confidence: "yet days can be golden, apples beautiful/ if eyes can see only days and apples."<sup>286</sup> "A Report" shows the fusion of memory and desire. The first few lines describe the various renowned person of history. People in general commemorate the social and political contribution of Hitler, Stalin, Lenin, Gandhi and King; but it becomes a mere ritual. Thus, history is used as memory in his poems:

Sleep again refusing, I  
Lest fall asunder,  
to dream of a blue Mysore house  
in Chicago.<sup>249</sup>

In the series of historical poems 'Bosnia' is perhaps a complete poem which raises the question of war, death, hunger, tragedy and some reflections on contemporary history. As a modernist, Ramanujan uses history in his poetry in order to revive his past. The poem opens with a complicated question relating to the existence of man; and to answer the emerging question of his mind, he writes on Bosnia, Biafra and Bangladesh. He displays the cruelties and atrocities that were committed on people. The facts of history are galvanized imaginatively for the principles of literature. The poet thinks of alphabetizing "Cruelties":

eating persimmons and sleeping  
safe

in the arms of lover, a wet moon  
in the mullioned-windows? How file  
away  
the friend just dead of ovarian cancer;  
a young breast cigarette-burned by a  
Jealous.<sup>247</sup>

The poem also reveals the atrocities committed on women and children, creating the inner sensations, terror, fear and havoc that take place because of war. The outer perception of the poet as a seer of human tragedies creates a gruesome atmosphere on the border territories:

... Where only death waits  
gun and milk in hand, Irony in his narrowed-eyes.  
Holding in one thought Bosnia Cancer  
persimmons, widows, serial killers,  
and you and me in our precarious safety?<sup>247</sup>

Related to the themes of nature and culture, the theme of domestic affairs is strongly realised in the poetry of Ramanujan. All the poems appearing in Black Hen Like, 'Contraries', 'Convention of Despair', 'Pain', Still Another Mother' 'Son to Father to Son', 'Love Poem for a wife I', 'Obituary', and 'Anxiety' display the theme of domestic affairs. The social and cultural themes make Prof. Williams regard Ramanujan an anti-romanticist and a staunch Hindu who always yearns for his Hindu identity in his poetry. Prof. S.K. Desai disagrees with Williams for making some resemblances between T.S. Eliot's "Christian Pessimism" and A.K. Ramanujan's Poetry in his identity as a Hindu (raivite) and in his acute sense of sin. Desai continues in the defence of A.K. Ramanujan thus:

Atheistic existentialism without Sartre's ethical passion (is it the result of his long stay in America) is, .....the right description on Ramanujan's world view and to

describe it in any other way involves strange and unconvincing explanations.<sup>15</sup>

In fact, Ramanujan minus the existential elements of Sastre becomes a keen observer of social manner and method therein. As a modernist, he watches social pangs, and as a realist makes them pictograph in his poetry. However, the Brahamanical 'Self' intrudes in his realism. Nature and culture form an indelible impression on the sensitive mind of the poet. His staunch Hinduism, Brahamanical order and the growing sense of rootlessness awake in him a sense of ethnicity. To be nostalgic to the past through memory minimises the cultural vaccum in a writer's mind. Thus,

The enunciation of cultural difference problematises the division of past and present, tradition and modernity at the level of culture representation and its authoritative address.... that iteration negates our sense of the origins of the struggle. It undermines our sense of homogenizing effects of culture symbols and icons, by questioning our sense of the authority of cultural synthesis.<sup>16</sup>

As a Professor of Linguistics in America, Ramanujan always leans upon Indian myths, images and symbols. Why does he do so? Certainly, he does so in order to realise his "self" as a Hindu. The poems "Mythologies I" and "Mythologies II" focus on his social and domestic 'selves' in the poetry. A mythic character Putna appears in 'Mythologies I'. She is sent by Kansa to kill Krishna; she offers her breast which is full of "poison and milk". Krishna sucks the Venom of her breast and she immediately becomes a demon from a mother. She thus achieves "Life in death": O Terror with a baby face/suck me dry. Drink my venom/Renew my breath."<sup>221</sup> 'Mythologies II' Portrays the incarnation of Lord Vishnu as Lion-God who finally kills Hrinaya Kashyap in order to save the life of Prahalad. The last lines of the poem describe the Indian sensibility of the poet:

O midnight sun, eclipse at noon  
net of loopholes, a house all threshold,  
connoisseur of negatives and assassin  
of certitudes, slay now my faith in doubt  
End my commerce with bat and night owl.  
Adjust may single eye, rainbow bubble,  
so I too may see all things.<sup>226</sup>

Too much brooding over the past for reviving his Indian self characterises sometimes the passivity in his poetry. The mode of culture, inhibitive perceptions and religious sensibility define the inner being of the poet. As modernist poet, he ironically displays to "marry again" and to go "the movies", but the conventional leaning towards moral views as Hindu prevents him to be so ("my particular hell only in my Hindu mind"<sup>34</sup>)

Finally, the poet wins over lower impulses, and determines to retain his conventions instead of a modern man without traditional and cultural morals:

of ideal tomorrow's crowfoot eyes  
and the theory of a peacock- feathered  
future  
No, no, give me back my archaic despair:  
It's not obsolete yet to live  
in this many lived lair  
of fears, this flesh.<sup>35</sup>

'Still Another Mother' poses yet another question for social identity of the poet. He is perplexed due to his brown identity in U.S.A. The images of "thick glasses", "Wearing chintz" and "eating mintz" become a modernist expression. The woman standing beside the wreckage van did

not feel any sensation even being touched by a short-limbed handsome man:

She stood there  
As if nothing had happened yet (perhaps nothing did)  
flickered at by the neon's on the door  
edges of her dress a fuzz, lit red.<sup>15</sup>

The two love poems, 'Love Poem for a Wife, I' and 'Love Poem for a Wife, II', sketch typically the Ramanujan attitude of love towards opposite sex. Nostalgic as he is, he feels the lack of "Unshared childhood" when he thinks of his love towards his wife in love poem, 1. Memory and nostalgia govern the language of the poem. The past appears in his present love:

you suddenly grow  
Nostalgic for my past and I  
envy your village dog-ride  
and the mythology  
of the seven crazy aunts.<sup>165</sup>

Based on some differences in the beginning, the second love poem also brings into being past spent in Kerala. The images Like "syriac face" for wife "Chameleon emerald" make the poet nostalgic. Through his memory, his grandmother appears in the poet, bearing "white/day and night in a village." Again the images like "adolescent in Aden", "stabbing Arabs" mix the history with myth. The poet dreams the fading and receding of the syriac face of his wife and he begins to find his own lost face, "Lost, cut/loose like my dragnet/ past."<sup>85</sup> Keatsean effect is discernible in this poem. The awakening from the dream and removing the mood of drowsiness, bring him back to realistic perceptions of life. In search of his 'self' he searches the nucleus of his life and finds it in his Indian ethos and Indian sensibility:

Behind: happy for once  
at such loss of face,  
whole in the ambivalence  
of being half woman half  
man contained in a common body,  
androgynous as a god balancing stillness in the middle  
of a dual to make it dance.<sup>85</sup>

The phrase "half-woman and half-man" refers to Lord Shiva who combines in Himself both forms of humanity and is known as *ardhnareshwar*.

However, the game of alienation and isolation persists in the innermost psyche of the poet. Even the realism of his thoughts does not satisfy him, for the question of "self" still remains with him: "a man/unhappy in the morning/ to be himself again, /the past still there, /a drying/net on the mountain."<sup>85</sup>

"Anxiety", "Obituary" and "Contraries" are the poems which become suggestive and symbolic of the social 'self' and Indian sensibility of the poet. As an abstract poem, 'Anxiety' enlarges and reveals the inner abstractions of human mind and inherent fears of human psyche. The concept of anxiety is personified with that of "the fear tree", an apt personification between nature of human mind and the nature outside the human mind. It is hard to see the engraved seeds of anxiety, for it exists in "secret twinges". His definition of anxiety is typically based on Indian sensibility.

Not geometric as the parabola  
of hope, it has loose ends  
with a knot at the top  
that's me.<sup>29</sup>

Perhaps, these lines remind a famous Sanskrit adage by which we are told that there lies the difference of point between anxiety and funeral Pyre.<sup>17</sup> The poet also compares the form of anxiety with "white snake". He also thinks of philosophically about the place of anxiety in human mind. Flames have only lungs. Water is all eyes.

The earth has bone for muscle  
And the air  
is a flock of invisible pigeons  
but anxiety  
can find no metaphor to end it.<sup>29</sup>

'Obituary' projects the poetic self about the familial tragedy that happens in poet's family. It describes the death of poet's father who passes away leaving behind him dust on a table full of papers, debts and daughters, a bed wetting grandson and" a house that leaned/slowly through our growing/years on a bent coconut/trees in the yard."<sup>111</sup>

A beautiful parallel between the nature of gunas and the cosmic nature is worked out in this poem: "Being the burning type/ he burned properly/at the cremation. "He hardly sees any change in the world after the death of his father; he rather reveals ironically about the fickle rituals of the society. The obituary as parenthesis is commemorated and the news of his father's death finds a small column in a newspaper of Madras. After sometimes, it was "sold by the kilo/exactly fours weeks later/ to street hawkers."<sup>12</sup> The poetic 'self' of the poet becomes realistic and ironic when he remarks about the death of his father:

For fun, and lately  
in the hope of finding  
these obituary lines  
and he left us

a changed mother  
and more than  
one annual ritual.<sup>112</sup>

Contraries' depict two opposite directions of human life: nature and culture. Hindu -dominated psyche is perceptible in this poem. The poet has used abundantly the modern and scientific images in this poem. These images bring out the inner turmoil of the poet's mind. The swinging between the two opposite poles of life nature and culture makes the poet seemingly obsessive for the question of his identity. The inner turmoil of human mind is revealed through the images like "earth worms" and "herons", suggesting the helplessness of the poet in an alien country. He feels here "like fat pelican". The physical beauty that once pleases him becomes ugliness and "truth are lies". He protests his immediate environment:

When, living by contraries,  
his roots are topsy-turvy trees  
river mirrors of heat,  
long deal faces fish at his feet,  
and ears have eyes.<sup>230</sup>

A.K. Ramanujan applies the theory of existentialist mode of expression. His two selves-the individual and the poetic selves- can be realized through the analysis of the text and the syntax used inside the text. To Kuntaka only the word meaning is not sufficient for the comprehension of *Kavya Pratibha* (Poetic imagination). When "Shabda" (word) and "Artha" (meaning) or the signifier and the signified come together, one creates the speech. But this relationship between the signifier and the signified alone does not constitute poetry. It should be verified by "*Pada-Vakya pramana*" - logic and denotation characteristics of non-poetic discourse:

What distinguishes the use of language in poetry, according to Kuntaka, is a special relationship between *Sabda* and *Artha*. Kuntaka calls this relationship *Vakrokti* —a kind of deviation from ordinary speech introduced by *Kavi-Vyapara*, a poet's genius. In such poetic language, Characterized by conscious deviation neither the signifier nor the signified (Vachya-Vachaka) more important.<sup>18</sup>

The association between the word and the meaning creates, according to Indian poetics, the meaning which becomes in reality the essence of poetry. Almost on similar lines Jan Mukarovsky argues the difference between the standard language and poetic language. Emphasizing that "poetic language is not always ornamental expression". Mukarovsky says in *On Poetic Language* that when both "these components (linguistic expression and expressed content) merge in distinguishably –this close linkage of theirs becomes the characteristic feature of poetic expression."<sup>19</sup>

According to the aesthetic of *Vakrokti* the specific unison between *Sabda* and *Artha* brings forth a literary deviation and this deviation can be read in the poems of Ramanujan. He makes a deviation (philosophic deviation) from individual self to the poetic self which makes the process of *Sadharanikarana* (transpersonalization of emotions) possible in the poetry of A.K. Ramanujan. There are two kind of the quests in his poetry: subjective and the objective or the individual self and the poetic self. The "poetic self" symbolizes the universal "self" of the poet. The subjective "self" wrestles irresistibly with the objective self; and it becomes a beautiful example *prabandha Vakrata* (*Vakrokti* in Composition). The first two volumes of his poetry – *The Strider* and *Relations* bring these ideas into practical shape:

with his culturally-mixed nature of consciousness, Ramanujan's poems search deeper into the layers of Hinduism, world and self. In the poems about his family past the poet resembles his childhood self and rediscovers its lasting meaning in a bid to get the self identified, located and defined.<sup>20</sup>

Ramanujan finds the fulfilment of his 'self' in revealing his Hindu identity. He also searches this identity through modernist expression of his ancestral heritage. 'Self-portrait' is a fine example for realising the poetic 'self' of the poet. He resembles every one in a foreign land but his perplexing 'self' makes him a complete stranger. This sense of strangeness alienates him from the rest of the society in which he lives. As a stranger and as an alienated man nostalgia surrounds him and makes him a passive man; and in his passivity, he seeks his identity in his parental heritage:

the portrait of a stranger,

date unknown,

often

signed in a corner

by my father.<sup>23</sup>

Out of the four Hindu poems of A.K. Ramanujan, the first one appears in his first volume, *The Striders*; and the remaining three occur in his second volume, *Relations*. 'A Hindu to His Body' is included in *The Striders*. The poem becomes symbolic of two things: the poet's desire and the innate fear for his individual 'self'. The poet reveals in this poem the question of biological fulfilment of man and woman; it also represents a successful fusion between nature and culture. He thinks that it is through body, he came into existence as a man; and, again it is through body, a man fulfils his desire and memory two strong instruments for the poetic expression of Ramanujan. He does not want to leave his garrulous face and

his unkissed alien mind. He strongly desires to have a passionate life. He also desires to be one with the objects of nature:

To rise in the sap of trees  
Let me go with you and feel the weight  
of honey-hives in my branching  
and the burlap weave of weaver-birds  
in my hair.<sup>40</sup>

The Remaining three Hindu poems appear in his second volume, Relations. The first one 'The Hindu': he doesn't hurt a fly or a spider either is an important poem for showing a Hindu way of life. There appears a marked Linguistic distinction between these two volumes. The first Hindu poem "A Hindu to His Body" is spelt with short vowel while later three Hindu poems appearing in Relations are spelt with long vowels for the sake of sound. The change in sound system symbolizes the intensity of the quest for identity. The poetic self wins over the individual self in the later poems and now the poet gives up the idea to have blind faith in all Hindu ideologies. He is now in the position to ridicule the apparent passivity or disinterestedness of Hinduism.

'The Hindoo: he doesn't hurt a fly or a spider either' becomes critical of the principle of too much tolerance of Hinduism. In the first few lines of the poem, the poet mocks at himself when he reveals the immoral sexual acts of his grand mother:

great swinging grand mother,  
and that other (playing at patience centred in his web)  
my own true ancestor  
the fisherman lover way laid her  
on the ropes in the Madras harbour;  
took her often from behind  
imprinting on her face and body.<sup>62</sup>

With "name and spirits" of his grand mother, he makes know to us the helplessness of his grand father. He could not stop this sexual drama, not because he is coward, but because of his Hindu culture which does not allow even to kill a spider or a fly. A Hindu who reads Gita should be calm in all events. His grandfather with his vision of life watches this drama of adultery and exhibits his passivity and helplessness for resisting this immoral situation in his own family:

And who can say I do not bear  
as I do his name, the spirit  
of Great Grandfather, that still man,  
Ultimately witness, timeless eye,  
perpetual outsider,  
watching as only husbands will  
a suspense of nets vibrate  
under wife and enemy.<sup>63</sup>

The realization of the poetic 'self' makes him the poet who works with a keen sense of "Objective correlative". So far as the scenes, situations and events even of his family are concerned, he becomes a realist and paints them in realistic manner before the readers. Even the later two poems, 'The Hindoo: he reads Gita and is calm at all events and 'The Hindoo: the only 'Risk' reveal the poetic self of the poet. The Hindoo: he reads Gita and is calm at all events'<sup>41</sup> Work out the odds that emanate from philosophic and historic facts of life. His poetic 'self' is disturbed when he expresses his concern for pre-historic views of our society:

...I look at wounds calmly  
yet when I meet on a little boy's face  
the prehistoric yellow eyes of a goat  
I choke, for ancient hands are at my throat<sup>79</sup>

'The Hindoo: The only Risk' discloses the men and women with weak will power. A Hindu is so weak that he even shudders to watch "a friend's suicide /to keep one's hand away from the kitchen knife."<sup>90</sup> The poet envisages perils if a Hindu follows blindly his philosophic vision of sthitaprajna. The regularity in his mind for not killing a spider even makes it difficult to a Hindu to watch the dead "Street dog" before the arrival of the scavengers. Here are some heart-felt perceptions of the poet about a Hindu:

Yes,

to keep cool when strangers' children hiss  
as if they know what none could know nor guess.

At the bottom of all this bottomless  
enterprise to keep simple the heart's given beat  
the only risk is heartlessness<sup>90</sup>

However, there is no denying the fact that Hindu consciousness prevails in most of the poems of Ramanujan. 'Looking for the Center' is an important poem in the sense that the poet searches the centre point of his life. His intensity to find out his centre goes in the same way as someone searches one's missing child. What kind of pangs one undergoes amidst such situation, the poet also feels that kind of inner pangs in the quest of his centre point. He even analyses scientifically the complete anatomy of human body. But he finds this missing centre in 'The Watcher' by relying fully on the Hindu vision of life. The elusive 'self' becomes a multiple level of consciousness. Apart from the flashes of Hinduism, the entire thematic contents of the poem are based on the philosophic vision of Manduka Upanishad. In Upanishadic vision the rishis used to be seer only; they did not participate in any incident of life. Ramanujan reveals this philosophy of seer in 'The Watchers; Like seer of Upanishads, the poet also becomes an objective observer and reports the out ward perceptions through his poetic

'self'. He sees that the higher 'self' of man is housed in the body and it is controlled by the mind. The anxiety, the curiosity, the quest, the fulfilment of desire, the tension between nature and culture, the revelation of historical consciousness and the individual self are the recurrent features which finally make the poet develop the objective perceptions in his poetry. 'The Watchers' reports about the poetic 'self' or an objective-correlative of the outer phenomena of the poet:

Lighter than light, blowing like air  
through key holes, they watch without questions  
the watchers,  
they watch even the question, as I live  
over and over with cancelled stamps,  
in verandas,<sup>137</sup>

The watchers with "Still point" watch without any attachment to a particular thing and objects. They are not interested even to be influenced by any external realities or falsehood. They are simply watchers who only watch and do nothing. To the poet, "It's the mark of superior beings." They are happy in sorrows and suffering; they do not distinguish between friends and foe:

Unwitting witness,  
impotence  
their supreme virtue, they move only  
their eyes and all things seem to find their form  
Mere seers  
they make the scene.<sup>137</sup>

This is the centre point of the poet and the highest point of Hindu philosophy of life. This is the point where subject submerges into object, creating a sense of oneness. Thus, Ramanujan has exploited the sources of

Hindu philosophic vision in order to realise the higher consciousness of human life:

Ramanujan has made a good use of his deep knowledge of Indian lore and literature, religion and mythology is his poetry. He makes a conscious and concerted effort of reconstructing the Hindu myths and legend in an excellent form.....Through the practice of this form, Ramanujan tried to infuse a fresh vein and style in contemporary Indian English poetry.<sup>21</sup>

The mythopoeic vision in his poetry is meant for the search of higher 'self' in poetry; and this he achieves it through the use of myths and symbols that spring from Indian history and anthropometrics knowledge. "Museum" and 'Black Hen' bring forth a distinctive fusion between the creator and the creation of the poem. The yearning to fulfil his poetic 'self' is clearly discernible in these poems. The seeming simplicity of these poems is deceptive. There are apparent contradictions in Ramanujan's poetry. 'Museum' is a wonderful poem which shows the apparent contradiction between the individual and poetic 'selves' of the poet:

As people who appear in dreams  
are not themselves, the horse  
are not horses in the Chinese Painting  
that prance out of the walls  
to trample the flowers in the emperor's gardens  
night after night.<sup>256</sup>

The unreality about the appearance of people in dream is linked with the unreality of the horses in the Chinese-Painting. The dream and painting are thus linked with the world of imagination. The third perception in the poem is the garden of flowers. The appearances of the people are put aside from their real selves. Again, the prancing of the horses is linked with the

verb "trample" and the act of trampling becomes the form of destruction in emperor's gardens. Symbolically, both the horses and the flowers are the part of the artist's mind. Molly Daniels Ramanujan remarks that "the flowers in the gardens could stand for the many things the maker values outside of his art. If we were to use paradigms for flowers, i.e., pets, Children and friends, we would get the scale of his life."<sup>22</sup> If the dream and the dreamer are the same person in this poem, the act of trampling of the flowers becomes symbolic of an incessant strife between the man who suffers and the mind which creates.

In comparison with the plurality of "People" and "horses" in "Museum", "Black Hen" exemplifies the singularity of the object: it also avoids the contraries of subject and object:

It must come as leaves  
to a tree  
or not at all  
yet it comes sometimes  
as the black hen  
with the red round eye.<sup>195</sup>

If the pronoun "It" is to be taken for the creation of the poets, the creation is linked thus with the growth of the leaves on a tree-a natural process of creation. The verb "come" is modified by adverb "sometimes" which conveys an unusual process of the creation; and again it is linked with "black hen" which has "red round eye". The linguistic and structural interpretation of the poem reveals the distinction between the poet and the poem. The creative process of the poetry is further linked with the act of "embroidery" which is woven "Stitch by stitch". The composition of the poem again raises an inner conflict between the individual "self" and the poetic "self" of the poet;

and when it's all there  
the black her stares  
with its round red eye  
and you're afraid.<sup>195</sup>

"A Meditation" as a serious poem of Ramanujan exhibits the theme of life-in-death and death-in-life. If the question of identity or rather a question of poetic 'self' is raised in "Black Hen", it also rotates around a black walnut tree in this poem. Apparently as a biographer of the walnut tree, the poet resembles a few similarities between the tree and himself. The walnut tree is toppled due to the rain and storm and falls down on the earth. The uprooting of the tree symbolically represents the uprooting of the poet himself. The tree after its fall in a storm undergoes many changes till it is finally shaped in the form of "butcher block table and a butcher block chair"<sup>195</sup>. Now the poet sits in this chair with his pen, paper on that table. The change in tree brings some sensational changes into the body and mind of the poet:

I know I'm writing now on my head,  
now on my torso, my living  
hands moving  
on a dead one, a firm imagined body  
working with the transience  
of breathless  
real bodies.<sup>240</sup>

Hence the subject and object coalesce together and the poetic 'self' of the poet is realised.

'Still Another View of Grace' represents the Brahamanical order of the poet. He loves his wife. But the tension between the two arises due to two different cultures one Brahamanical and the other Christian. The tension becomes more intensified when the poet remembers his Brahmin

parentage and becomes nostalgic about the superiority of being a Brahmin. In the beginning of the poem, the word "burned" is repeated twice with an answer of finding a "thought" for his burning inside and that "thought" was the superiority of his cultural heritage. He is a Hindoo who reads Gita and remains calm in all situations. But the poem becomes realistic in the last lines of it. The poet is of the opinion that the need for bodily union is more emergent than cherishing the philosophical principles. The rising storm inside human mind for physical reality poses a tension between nature and culture. Finally, the traditional values as cultural norms yield before the rising storm of passions:

Bred Brahmin among singers of shivering  
hymns  
I shudder to the bone at hungers that roam  
the street  
beyond the constable's beat. But there  
She stood  
upon that dusty road on a night lit april  
mind  
and gave me a look. Commandments  
crumbled  
in my father's past. Her tumbled hair  
suddenly known.  
as silk in my angry hand I shook a  
little  
and took her, behind the laws of my land.<sup>45</sup>

The overall impression after making a critical analytical study of his poems is that there are multidimensional threads in the poetry of A.K. Ramanujan. The refusal to accept fully the traditional and conventional code of parental heritage he inherits from his Brahmanical order makes

him a poet of integrity-an integrity that fills his poetry with an open-endedness and a higher poetic consciousness. As a modernist, he works on contraries that make the poet undergo some psychological devices like memories, nostalgia and peeping into consciousness for occasional flashes of poetic gems which are to be explored from the hidden parts of human psyche. In fact, Ramanujan is such an artist who brings the total unity of all times and uses it as the total consciousness that emanates from the theory of *Vakrokti*-the linguistic analysis of the word and its meaning. Ramanujan as a linguist undergoes the theoretic norms of Indian Poetics more specially the theory of *Vakrokti* for bringing into being the poetic self in the composition of his poetic works.

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# **CHAPTER – 6**

## *IMAGERY*

## IMAGERY

The different canons of Indian Poetics have been analysed and their application to the poetry of A.K. Ramanujan have also been made. In the continuity of analysis, this chapter will analyse the role of Imagery in the embellishment of language and for the artistic beauty as a whole. According to the principles of Indian Poetics, the beauty is not only objective but subjective as well. The perception of subjectivity finally becomes objectivity through the feelings of *Sahridaya*, a responsive reader.

A.K. Ramanujan has seen the objects of beauty in various natural scenes. And he deals these objects of beauty with the use of appropriate images. But before analysing the objects of beauty, the post structure view points in his poetry, the role and concept of imagery should be defined:

According to New International Dictionary, an image is a mental representation of something not actually presents to the senses, a revival or imitation of sensible experience or of sensible experience together with accompanying feelings, the reproduction in memory or imagination of sight, touch, hearing etc, as visual tactile, auditory images.<sup>1</sup> In broad perspectives, it can be said that an image is an idea which receives and retains an exact image of what is observed. Image, thus, becomes an artificial imitation or representative of the external form of any object, especially of a person or of the bust of a person. The following points can be described for the detail description of the image:

- a) An imitation in the solid form, a statue, effigy, and sculptured figure often applied to figures of saints or divinities as the objects of religious veneration.
- b) An imitation which is delineated, painted, executed in relief etc. upon a surface, a likeness, portrait, picture carving or the like.

- c) An imitation which is applied to the constellation as figures or delineations of persons etc.
- d) An image is applied to a person
  - i) as stimulating the appearance of someone as considered to be unreal; and
  - ii) as compared in some respect to a statue or ideal.<sup>2</sup>

In Physics, image is an optical representation or counter part of an object. In rhetoric's image is anything concrete or abstract introduced figuratively to represent something which is strikingly resembles as sleep for death. In other words, one can say that it is simile, metaphor or figures of speech. This way, it represents also the oblique manner and suggestive pattern of composition. A.K. Ramanujan in his poetry makes the application of various images in order to create suggestive and oblique pattern of literary expression. An image in the poetry of A.K. Ramanujan is often an adventure leading the reader into unsuspected avenues of experience. His imagery is noted for its concreteness and power. This poet who spent the best part of his life in the United States of America has a singular ability to provide a very strong Indian Physical context to the thoughts his poetry conveys. His imagery has wide range-objects in Nature, colours, light and darkness, animals, the human body, the city life, legends and fairy tales-all fall within the range of his imagery. All these images are drawn with exceptional care and competence. C. Paul Verghese underlines an important aspect of Ramanujan's imagery when he says that the poet's images are "highly concentrated in their effect"<sup>3</sup> *The Striders* is a poem about a water insect, which is called "strider" in "New England". The poet blends images of the sky and water with those of the body with great skill:

And search  
for certain thin-  
stemmed, bubble eyed water bugs

see them perch  
On dry capillary legs  
weightless  
On the ripple skin  
of a stream  
No, not only prophets  
Walk on water. This bug sits  
on a land slide of lights  
and drowns eye-  
deep  
into its tiny strip of sky.<sup>4</sup>

In the first movement of the poem, the two adjectives for the water bugs are "thin-stemmed" and "bubble eyed". Stem brings to the mind the image of the tree or plant while bubble suggests water. The suggestion that these bugs are found near water and possibly there are stems (of need or other kinds of grass) too in the picture. But the poet is describing a living thing and not water or stems and so in the next line the adjectival for the legs are "Capillary" suggesting a living body. These capillaries, however, are not full of blood; they are brown or translucent and hence "dry". The image related to the living body continues and it becomes a metaphor for the surface of the stream. The surface of the stream is called "ripple skin", suggesting the living insect.

The second movement of the poem brings in a reference to the prophets who were known to walk on water. The strider too can walk on water. The parallel between the water bug and prophets introduces an element of mystery. The poet suggests that the bug's ability to float on water is something of mystery about it. When the idea of floating effortlessly has been established, the poet suggests light and depth of water. The bug is seen sitting on "a land slide of lights" suggesting simultaneously

the lights playing on the rippling waters and the mountains with which the words landslide is associated. The concluding eye deep into "its tiny strip/ of sky". The image stands in contrast with the idea of weightlessness and floating like prophets that the poem has presented so far. The result is that we have a picture of an insect that can walk on the surface of water in which the clear sky is reflected. The small size of the water bug is suggested by the word "tiny" used for that part of the sky's reflection against which the strider is seen such economical and exceptionally evocative use of imagery is typical of Ramanujan and in this area there are very few Indian poets in English who can achieve such powerful effect with so little lexical support.

'Snakes' is another animal-poem that makes use of the image of the snake in different ways and suggests multiple sensations. The poet finds himself thinking of snakes not when he is walking "through the woods".<sup>5</sup> But when he is least expecting it. The image of a snake comes to him when he is "walking through museums of quartz" or in the airles of book stacks/ looking at their geometry /without curves"<sup>6</sup> and when he touches a book that has "gold /on its spine". The image of the snake that comes to the poet has both visual and aural elements:

The twirls of their hisses  
rise like the tiny dust cones on  
slow-noon roads  
winding through the farmers' feet.  
Black lorgnetters are etched on  
their hoods,  
Ridiculous, alien, like some terrible  
aunt  
a crest among tiles and scales  
that moult with the darkening

half  
of every moon.<sup>7</sup>

The hissing of the snake is transferred to the rising twirl of dust on "slow-noon" roads on which the farmers walk. It brings to the reader the image of snake-charmers displaying their hooded cobras on the side of dusty road on hot days.

The image suggested in the second movement of the poem is detailed further in the following movement. We are given the image of a "basketful of ritual cobras" that comes into the "tame little house". They are left on the floor to crawl:

their brown-wheat glisten ringed  
with ripples.

They lick the room with their bodies,  
curves

Uncurling, writing a sibilant  
alphabet of panic  
on my floor.<sup>8</sup>

In the phrase "a sibilant alphabet of panic" we have a sense not only of the shape of the snake but also of the sibilant sound itself suggesting the hissing of the snake. The panic is both the snakes and those who watch them, particularly the poet as a child. This becomes evident when the speaker's mother is mentioned. She "gives them milk/in saucers", and watches them suck it. The child is scared:

The snake man wreathes their writhing  
round his neck  
for father's smiling  
money. But I scream.<sup>9</sup>

The image of the snake is intertwined with memories of the poet's childhood. Everything is seen in the shape of a snake even the braids of his sister:

Sister ties her braids  
with a knot of tassel  
But the weave of her knee-long  
braid has scales,  
their gleaming held by a score of  
clean new pins.<sup>10</sup>

The image of the snake is closely linked with violent death. This is the death of the snake that is struck by a "clickshodheel" making the "green white" of the snake's belly turn looking like "a water-bleached lotus stalk/plucked by a landman's hand. The sight of the snake's body fills the child's with a sense of panic. The poem ends with the image of the snake lying like a "Sausage rope" when flies in the sun "will mob the look in his eyes".

Ramanujan's poem about snakes offers elements of comparability with Keki N. Daruwalla's "Haranag" that too describes the killing of a snake:

The stick came down in repetitive rage on a shimmering  
dance of coils and his innards lay scattered on the floor."<sup>11</sup>

The essential difference between the two poems is that in Ramanujan's poem the child's point of view has been used in which there is a combination of fear and fascination, whereas Daruwalla has introduced sexual imagery and a mysterious sense of fascination. The snake was killed by the man in the bathroom in the presence of his naked wife who had been bathing when the snake was seen. Element of superstition is more prominently suggested in Daruwalla 's poem:

At night she said, we must make  
amends  
and offer milk and grain again;  
I agreed and started pouring  
a most pungent eye drop  
and found her eye-ball scuttling north  
into the forest of the upraised lid  
leaving behind a white desert eye,  
and again I found her trembling  
like a trapped bird  
facing a serpent hood.<sup>12</sup>

What is common, however, in the two poems is the powerful imagery that the poets have used.

Ramanujan has used the image of a snake a number of times. Whenever such imagery is used it suggests fear, mystery and certain kind of fascination. It can also suggest violence as in his poem 'Breaded Fish'. The poet is eating bread when the memory of a dead woman "dead/ on the beach in a yard of cloth" comes to him:<sup>13</sup>

Specially for me she had some breaded  
fish; even thrust a blunt headed  
smelt into my mouth;  
and looked hurt when I could  
neither sit nor eat, as a hood  
of memory like a coil on a heath  
opened in my eyes.<sup>14</sup>

Similarly in "A Leaky Tap After a Sister's Wedding" too, there is a very telling image of snake that concludes the poem:

My sister and I have always wished a tree  
could shriek or at least writhe

like the other snake  
We saw under the beak  
of crow.<sup>15</sup>

In 'Anxiety' the feeling of fear is evoked with the help of number of images the most prominent among them being those of fire, water and the snake. Anxiety is not branchless as the fear tree "but it has naked roots and secret twigs":<sup>16</sup> The feeling has loose ends with a "knot at the top" that is me: Later we come across the image of a snake and flowing waters:

Not wakeful in its white snake  
glassy ways like the eloping gaiety of waters,  
it drowses, viscous and fibred as pitch.<sup>17</sup>

The poem "The Fall" makes use of animal imagery in an exceptionally effective way to suggest sudden change. The poem opens with a suggestion of someone plunging down wards helplessly:

Falling,  
I think of a man falling,  
a plummet in a parachute  
that will take half his life to sprout  
and take root,  
while he, a mere body, a surrender,  
a will-less plunge into the down ward  
below his blindness, cannot find a word  
for a curse, nor an eye for a hook.<sup>18</sup>

Then suddenly there is a sudden catch "of grace". There is a metaphor of wolves to suggest the howling of the wind and that of a "mother cat's teeth/on the scruff of her kitten" . . . The exhilaration felt is that of "larks".

Ramanujan's poem "Fear" in his book Second Sight uses a series of animal images to suggest the different meanings of fear. There is the fear involving destruction on a mass scale:

For you, fear  
is Terror  
wound museums  
of Hiroshima,  
the smell  
of cooking  
in Dacca sewers  
Madame Nhu 's  
Buddhist barbecues;  
that well-known child  
in napalam flames  
with x-ray bones  
running, running  
a stationary march  
in the rods  
and cones  
of every one 's  
Reuter eyes.<sup>19</sup>

Death in Hiroshima, carnage in Bangladesh and similar spectacular incidents of violence reposted in the newspapers are what fear means to many people. But for the poet fear is small and it can be caused by "a certain knock /on the back door/ a minute / after midnight. It can even be caused by:

.... a ting  
white lizard,  
its stare, dead snake

mouth  
and dinosaur  
toes.<sup>20</sup>

All these images may frighten a person if they are lodged in his "sleeping ignorant /skull".

In his 'Relations' there is an interesting poem about a former prince that has a number of animal figures that contribute to the total meaning. The last of the princes belongs to a family that once was important and rich. The dynasty to which he belongs withered away, some members dying of TB and other of a London Fog. Some die of bone TB and other "imported wine and women." One or two died in "War or Poverty".

Fathers, Uncles, Seven  
folklore brothers, sister so young so  
lovely  
that snakes loved her and hung dead,  
ancestral  
lovers, from the ceiling; brother's many  
wives their unborn still babies,  
numberless  
cousins, royal mynahs and parrots  
in the harem:  
every one died, to pass into his slow  
conversation. He lives on, heir to long  
fingers, faces in paintings and a belief  
in auspicious  
snake in the skylight: he lives on, to cough,  
remember and sneeze.<sup>21</sup>

Here the image of the snake objectifies something that is timeless bringing it into contrast with the mynahs and parrots that represent the

ordinary and the familial. Both have disappeared. He is now a sick person whose two daughters "go to school on half-fees" and whose first son who is a trainee in telegraphy has already telegraphed thrice for money.

The use of images related to the human body perform many functions. In Ramanujan's "Pleasure" in Second Sight the images related to the female body suggest the unbridled passion of the "celibate" monk. The naked monk is "ravaged by spring /fever, the vigour /of long celibacy / lusting now as never before/for the reek and sight" of the female body. He lusts for a body represented in terms of flower:

of mango bud, now tight now  
loosing into petal  
Stamen and butterfly  
his several mouths  
thirsting for breasts  
buttock, smells of finger  
long hair, short hair  
the wet of places never dry.<sup>22</sup>

The monk's lust is caused by the presence of female devotees and he fantasizes about them. The feeling is roused even "by wisps, self touching self". He almost salivates and the saliva is the cool Ganga" turning sensual on him". The irony in self touching self is obvious as the term "self" used so frequently in the religious discourse of the monks, is used in a completely different sense. His philosophy is "slimed" by its own "saliva". It smears his own "Private" untouchable":

body with honey  
thick and slow as pitch.<sup>23</sup>

Throughout the first part of the poem images related to the human body, especially those related to the sense are prominently used. There are words like "sight", "tight," "loosening"; "mouth"; "breast"; "buttock";

"finger"; "hair"; "skin"; and saliva-all adding up to suggest sexual passion of a person who, is forbidden by tradition and his own voluntary decision to live the life of a celibate monk.

In the concluding part of the poem the image of red ants is the most prominent suggesting the monk's helplessness in the face of an all conquering desire:

and stood continent  
at last on an anthill  
of red fire ants, crying  
his old formulaic cry.<sup>24</sup>

The actual sensation of pleasure is more than an idea; it felt "in the million mouths/of pleasure-in-pain". The image of the ants climbing every limb of his shows his helplessness. The word "fire" used with ants conveys a sense of burning. The desire is so strong that it even engulfs his feeling of guilt.

A poem like "No man is an Island" presents the image of the sea and an island in terms of crocodile. The island is seen as an alligator and the ocean seems to foam in its mouth:

The entire island:  
an alligators  
sleeping in a mask of stone  
A grin of land  
Even on good days; on bad,  
the ocean foams in that mouth.<sup>25</sup>

The poet builds on this image and the small "sea-birds" are seen picking "its teeth" for yellow crabs and jelly fish: The last two lines bring in the human element:

But this man,  
I know, buys dental floss,

The image of the teeth becomes a means of making statement on man is today's world.

A.K Ramanujan often uses colour imagery in which various colors become a means of suggesting different feelings. In "On the Very Possible Jaundice of an Unborn Daughter" in The Striders, one of his early poems, the yellow colour predominates as it is the colour of the eyes of a person suffering from Jaundice. The poet fears that his unborn daughter may be born with Jaundice. He thinks this is possible because as so many things in the world are yellow, the eyes of his unborn daughter too may have eyes yellow with Jaundice:

When mynahs scream in the cages  
siamese cats with black on their paws  
tiptoe from the sulphur mines of the  
sun  
into the shadow of our house.<sup>26</sup>

The mynahs have a bright yellow band along their beaks, sulphur too is yellow and the colour that is highlighted (especially by the contrasting "black on their paws") is yellow. In the second stanza more yellow objects are mentioned:

Father sits with the sunflower at the  
window

deep in the yellow of a revolving chair,  
fat, bilious, witty, drawing small ellipses  
in the revolving air.

And plunges in a parallax of several eclipses to our earth  
where we pull grasshopper's wings and feed red ink and  
lemon-peel of dragonflies.<sup>27</sup>

The sunflower, the yellow revolving chair and the reference to eclipses in which the sun and the moon become pale yellow all add to the

effect created by the first stanza. In the concluding stanza, the flower that "flaps all morning" in grandma's hands is "that daffodil", a yellow flower. When so many things in the world are yellow by accident, the poet asks:

how can my daughter  
help those singing yellow  
in the whites of her eyes?<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, in "It Does not Follow, but When in the Street" in Relation the yellow colour is the most prominently uses. Here too, yellow signifies fear and uncertainty about future:

yellow trees bend over broken glass  
and the walls of Central Jail  
drip with spring's laburnum  
yellows, yellow on yellow,  
I forget the eczema on my feet,  
the two holes in my shoe: at once  
I know  
I'll have a sharp and gentle daughter  
an old age some where; I walk on air.<sup>29</sup>

As in the poem about the unborn daughter, here too everything described is yellow: the trees bending over the walls of Central Jail are yellow and laburnum is a small decorative tree bearing bunches of yellow flowers. The poet thinks of the colour yellow and his daughter who is yet to come and his old age "somewhere" and feels a sense of disquit. He can imagine a scene of domestic bliss in future:

I walk on water, can even bear  
to walk on earth for my wife  
and I will someday somehow share  
a language, a fire, a clean first floor.  
with a hill in the window.<sup>30</sup>

The poet dares to dream all this despite the fact that colour yellow (signifying decay) is what fills his mind.

In THE HINDOO: he reads his Gita and is calm at all events too the reference to the yellow eyes of a goat signifies fear. The poet describes a character who follows the Gita and watches everything with equanimity:

I've learned to watch lovers without envy  
as I'd watch in a bazaar lens  
houseflies rub legs or kiss. I look at  
the wounds calmly.<sup>31</sup>

Yet when he meets "the prehistoric yellow eyes of a goat" on a little boy's face" he chokes. Here the colour yellow once again signifies terror.

"The Day Went Dark" in "The Black Hen" makes a very effective use of colour imagery. The poem begins with a description of carpet that the poet bought. It has a design of "orange flower/ and green leaves." But when it is spread it makes everything look old and ugly:

but all my furniture  
looked bilious yellow  
in its gorgeous light.<sup>32</sup>

This has a parallel in a situation involving a relationship:

I loved a woman  
with turquoise eyes,  
naval like a whirlpool  
in a heap of wheat  
and the day went dark  
my hands were lizards,  
my heart turned into hound.<sup>33</sup>

In this poem the colour imagery coupled with images drawn from farming and the animal world conveys the sense of contrast powerfully.

Similarly in 'LOVE 6: Winter' too, colour imagery has been used quite powerfully. This is a poem about different perceptions and the habit and the of the mind to translate an experience in to terms that it is used to. The poem opens with very graphically suggested visual imagery:

Green leaves on a grey tree  
look almost like flowers,  
Sudden smiles on a chickenpox  
face, or an accidental touch between quarrels.<sup>34</sup>

The poet brings together visual imagery ("green leaves on a grey tree and a smile on a chickenpox face") and tactile imagery ("an accidental touch") and suggests the element of unexpectedness in situations. The second movement of the poem foregrounds the auditory:

Though blindness cannot see,  
it can hear the hours  
Chime, now close now far from clocks  
across my shop window city.

After this momentary loss of sight as it were, the poet once again brings in images of colour and light. He speaks of a "hall/ of mirrors for squirrels" and finds that the blind eye can begin to "look for grey within grey". The sky scrapers are seen" in silhouette"

every cell lit in gold  
without waiting for night:

The eye within, however sees what it wishes to see :

but unseeing, the eye with in  
Wants only red or green on grey  
to sense in winter the heat,  
translate new signals in old  
Ways taking the dark for light.

The colours are in the mind and everything seen is transformed by a person's desire to see what he wishes to see.

In Ramanujan's Relations, "Prayers to Lord Murugan" makes use of colour imagery at regular intervals, once very prominently in every section. A poem about Murugan an ancient Dravidian god of fertility, war, love and youth, it is in the form of an address of the god in tone that is not very respectful. Murugan is the lord of "new arrivals /lovers and rivals". He arrives with "cock fight and banner/ dance": There are "garland / on the chests of men" that will turn like "Chariot wheels". The poet suggests the atmosphere of a village festival in honour of the god:

O where are the cockscombs and where  
the beaks glinting with new knives  
at cross roads  
  
When will orange banners burn  
among blue trumpet flowers and the  
shade  
of trees  
  
waiting for lightnings?<sup>35</sup>

The section builds the picture on colours like orange, blue and the green of the trees and suggests how people pray to the god for rains suggested by "lightnings".

The god is shown as having six faces and twelve hands. The second section has more statements than suggestive imagery laden lines. The plainness in the pictorial quality is in contrast with the first section:

Twelve etched arrowheads  
for eyes and six unforeseen  
faces, and you were not  
embarrassed.  
  
Unlike other gods

you found work  
for every face,  
and made  
eyes at only one  
woman. And your arms  
are like faces with proper  
names.

After this relatively non-visual section, there is once again strong colour imagery. Lord Murugan is described as the lord of "green growing things". He protects the crops and helps the farmer in his fight "with the fruit-fly". He decides whether things will grow:

Tell us,  
will the red flower ever  
come to the branches  
of the blueprint  
city?

The next section too makes use of colour imagery. Murugan is the "Lord of great changes and Small / Cells". He is requested to exchange "our painted grey /pottery /for iron copper" and "our yellow grass and lily seed".

for rams  
flesh and scarlet rice for carnivals  
on rivers

The sections ends with more colour images:

O dawn of nightmare virgins  
bring us  
your white-haired witches who wear  
three colours even in sleep.

Lord Murugan is the lord of "the spoor of the tigers". Then the poem acquires a bitterly angry tone and the pronoun "our" used throughout the

fifth section refers to us as people. The animal imagery with which this section begins gains momentum as the poet adds more such images to it:

out side our town hyenas  
and civet cats live  
on the kill of leopards  
and tigers  
too weak to finish what's begun.  
Rajahs stand in photograph  
over nine foot silken tigresses  
that sycophants have shot.  
Sleeping under country fans  
hearts are worm cans  
turning over continually  
for the great shadows  
of fish in the open  
waters.<sup>36</sup>

We live on legends and in the past. We remember the ivory, the apes and the peacocks that we sent to King Solomon. We are proud of the quality of muslin we produced in the past. He speaks in terms of the similes for the fine quality of our muslins: "Wavering snake-skins, a cloud of steam". We are like ever rehearsing astronauts. We "purify and return our urine" to "the circling body". This section thus enlarges the context of the poem and can be seen as criticism of the sham that characterizes our national life.

Section 6 continues the comment on our national character. Murugan is called the "Master of red bloodstains" but we have lost the redness of our blood. Here redness may signify courage. Our blood today "is brown" and "our collar" is white. The white collar refers to the middle class Indian, which while dreaming of Indian's supposed past greatness does not do

anything to contribute to nation building. We talk to the "sixty four rumoured arts." Such memory of our past greatness is like the feeling of pins and needles that an amputee has in his "phantom muscle".

The next section presents the twelve-handed image of Lord Murugan. The god has twelve hands all of which are "right hands" while we "are your mirror men" with two left hands. The left hands suggest our inability to do anything properly:

Lord of the twelve right hands  
Why are we your mirror men  
With the two left hands  
Capable of only casting  
reflections? Lord  
of faces,  
find us the face  
we lost early  
this morning.<sup>37</sup>

The section depends on images related to hands and face for its appeal. The hands symbolize man's ability to bring about a change in the given situation. The two left hands show that we have proved to be incapable of doing that. Similarly, the face represents the image a person has. When it comes to having an identity we have lost it. It is like losing our face. The contrast between the ideal (the god) and the actual (we) is very sharply brought out.

The poem then lists what the devotee would want to have. The poem becomes almost a prayer. We wish to read the "small prints" and we pray to the "lord of headlines" to give us this ability. To be able to read the small print may mean the ability and the humility to understand the "ordinary" things in life. The lord has the sixth sense also but we wish to have our five senses back:

Lord of the sixth sense,  
give us back  
our five senses.

Getting back the five senses implies that once we could see and hear but now we have become desensitized. We are so much engrossed in ourselves that we cannot interact with the world. The five senses suggest channels of moving away from the personal to the non-personal. The loss of the five senses becomes a metaphor for the loss of an entire world of experience. The 8<sup>th</sup> section concludes with the lines:

Lord of solution,  
teach us to dissolve  
and not to drown

The devotee prays for power to control things and not be swamped by them.

The next section is very similar to section 8 in its directness and simplicity. The devotee prays to the lord who symbolizes "presence" to deliver him" proxies and absences". Proxy suggests that most of us lead lives that are modelled on someone else's life. Absence implies that we live only in name. He wants to be delivered

from Sanskrit and the mythologies  
of night and the several  
round table mornings  
of London and return  
the future to what  
it was.

The prayer for deliverance from various kinds of falsehood is very strongly uttered.

The next section is built round images drawn from rural life:

Lord return us,  
Bring us back  
to a litter  
of six new pigs in a slum  
and a sudden quarter  
of harvest.<sup>38</sup>

The images suggest birth and regeneration. Section 11, which is the last section of the poem, has images suggesting movement. We are lost and the poet prays to the lord to find us. The god needs to "hunt us down". The lord has all the answers and let us have those answers that cure us at once "of prayers". Then the need to pray will end as we shall have understanding. "Prayer to Lord Murugan" is a typical Ramanujan poem in which images are drawn from a wide area of experience through one kind of image-work predominates. The poem makes good use of colour imagery.

In many of his poems, Ramanujan has made a very effective use of the images of light and darkness. "On a Delhi Sundial" may be cited as the example of a poem in which the poet uses light imagery with success. The theme of the poem is time and its relationships with human life. The poem opens with the image of clock-tower that stands in the market-place and controls life around it:

Four-faces clocks on market-towers school  
the town  
and make the four directions sell and buy  
in the stall below where watches run  
their certainties on the uncertain pulse.<sup>39</sup>

The entire activity of buying and selling is controlled by the clock-tower in the market place. The watches represent the certainty of time when the pulse that marks time itself is uncertain. The watches are described as "pretty machines that slice the country silence". But the certainty of time is

unreal as all watches "give up their four and twenty circles" on to time "like rings /from a smoker's youth". The simile of a smoker's youth is very effective as it at once conjures up images of waste and death.

The second movement of the poem takes the readers through a series of images that culminate into the final image of light and darkness:

Only sundials today do not remind  
you  
of the right under your eyes. Their  
time's  
Circles never drive beyond the  
dusk.  
but lie down as Children 's hoops  
beneath the shoe- infested stairs.  
Only they  
sleep with us in the dark and wake  
into time  
with the light of the moon like antiquity's  
lovers.  
But who, among tourists  
On a five-day tour, can put the clock  
back  
and run into sundial time?  
Or endure these wheeling knives  
that mince  
the night for the morning's breakfast.<sup>40</sup>

The poem has two sets of contrasting images: the watch that runs no matter whether it is day or night and the sundial that shows time only when the sun is up. The watch image hints at the mechanical nature of our life while the sundial objectifies another sense of time which does not mince

the day into small units. The context is that of a tourist visiting a place, which has a sundial. It is possible that the tourist is on a five-day visit to India in which he has to do all his sight-seeing including the observatory or the Jantar Mantar in Delhi. The poet seems to have a desire to free himself from the tyranny of the ever-present sense of time that seem to remind us of the "the rings" under our eyes caused by over work or stress or anxiety-all consequences of allowing time to dominate our lives.

In contrast to this is the image of the peacefully rising and setting sun controlling lives without giving circles under our eyes. Dusk is the time beyond which time's circles do not go. Here we have contrasting images of light and darkness. Sleeping is associated here with darkness and waking with light. The image suggests the natural cycle of nature. We however, have forgotten about "Sundial time" and like these tourists want to pack everything in the short time allotted to us. The final image is of the night being shredded by the seconds for morning's breakfast. The poem has a signification that goes beyond the questions of living a life more closely attuned to the natural rhythm of life. It also draws into its area of relevance the larger issues of the purpose of life-and the harmony between man and Nature.

On Memory in The Striders, a poem that reminds us of Donne's 'Go and Catch a Falling Star' in its structure and tone, has images of light and mirrors. The poet is ready to give "tangent" answers to all kinds of questions except the one that concerns the nature of memory. He can answer questions about Tipu Sultan or Jack and Jill or about anything at all.

Ask me

nursery rhymes

on Tipu Sultan or Jack and Jill:

the cosmetic use of gold when

the Guptas ruled:

an item of costume in  
Shakespearean times.<sup>41</sup>

All such questions "will gobble away" their "tangent answers" but not for all his "blood beat" or "the drill of that wood pecker beak" that is his will can be hold or "keep" "one face":

and those words random-thrown  
in a tumble of your multiple faces  
as they turn in this day's dazzle,  
this sun- struck house of mirrors.

Memory

in a crowd of memories, seems  
to have not place  
at all for unforgettable things.<sup>42</sup>

Like a typical Donne poem, this ends with a statement that is intriguing. It is the yoking together of contrasts-memory unable to hold the really unforgettable things. The contradiction is resolved only when one remembers that poet has used the words memory and unforgettable things in two different contexts. In a poem that is more a statement than conscious image making what really shines is the image of the "day's dazzle" and that of the "sun-struck house of mirrors." Mirrors indicate the repetition of the same pattern again and again. Keki N. Daruwalla in his poem "The Professor Condolers" uses the image of multiple mirrors when he describes the world of tragedy as sky canopied by mirrors.

A series of surrealistic images foregrounding the visual and the contrast between light and darkness are presented in Ramanujan's contraries (The Black Hen). This style of writing is one of the constant features in the poetry of Ramanujan. The poem reminds us of 'On Memory' thought the two poems are separated by a period of about thirty years. Here a number of impossible situation are described:

Blinking in the light  
she stares into midnight  
Crowed by the dark  
her eyes see glowing monarch  
butterflies.<sup>43</sup>

The images of mutually exclusive light and darkness create a surreal sense of things happening at different planes simultaneously. This is the poet's attempt to describe the experience of living in today's world:

Beauty is now ugly, sad is glad,  
truths are lies  
when living by contraries  
his roots are topsy-turvy trees.<sup>44</sup>

The last line echoes Swift's essay "Meditations Upon a Broomstick" with its evocation of a world in which the real is far removed from the ideal.

"Fog" in The Black Hen is, once again about the predicament of contemporary life. The poem presents a series of images related to the human body, each objectifying the different sides of the existential angst. The need to move on is great and yet the movement does not result in progress. This has been suggested by the images of oxen turning round at the oil press, a picture that has been coupled with the turning of the eyes suggesting the desire to find a way but not succeeding in it:

Stuck in the need to move on,  
eyes turn round and round  
Oxen at the oil press.<sup>45</sup>

The eyes turning in the sockets are themselves a metaphor for helplessness which has been strengthened by another metaphor of oxen moving in a circle. The poem then takes up the idea of change and finds the wait for change endless. Here again, there is a conflict between desire and

actuality. The central image in this movement is that of a body seen together with that of a pupa trying to become a butterfly. There is restlessness and the inability to move forward:

Waiting for change, the body  
Changes a Chrysalis  
that will rot unless it breaks  
into wings. Restless, unable to move,  
Claustrophobic in elevators,  
those prisons that move on their own,  
hand strain against the present tense,  
a labyrinth with cement pillars,  
trees without leaf or season,  
legs running without moving.<sup>46</sup>

The condition for liberation from this shell is the breaking of it. Unless that happens, the Chrysalis does not become a butterfly and rots in its shell. The act of growing old goes on ("the body changes") but not much else changes. The restlessness coupled with the inability to move leads to frustration. This sense of frustration is suggested by images of an elevator and that of a prison. The poem once again makes use of imagery related to the body when the poet shows hands straining against the present, a action that shows the desire to prevent the collapsing walls of this claustrophobic world. Immediately after the image of the straining hands there is that of running legs that seem to be moving on a treadmill. They actualize a situation that is full of meaningless unproductive activity. The poem brings in images of cement pillars and that of leafless trees and finally that of fog that "lifts an hour at a time" and a "cold that burns without blisters." The concluding lines once again refer to the human body. The passing of time is like the beating of the pulse at a moment of defeat that is suggested by the image of a fallen wrestler over whom the umpire is counting seconds. It is:

Pulse ticking off time like  
an umpire over a fallen wrestler.

This poem uses a mixture drawn from city life and those of the human body. The starkness of the situation is hinted at by the images of limbs reducing it to a fundamental physical level. The human situation is comparable to the animal, perception that has been implied by the images of the oxen turning round an oil press and that of a pupa. The lexis and syntax in the poem reflect the theme. The poem has a nervous, jerky rhythm and words that are generally short give a sense of urgency to the tone.

Ramanujan has made an effective use of imagery drawn from the human body in his poem, "A River". This is a poem that uses both contrast and irony and describes the Vaigai near Madurai in flood as well as when it is dry. The river has been the subject of many poems in this "City of temples and poets"<sup>47</sup> who sang of "cities and temples". The poet, then, describes the river in summer and the receding water and the rocks becoming visible that have been seen as a human body getting emaciated:

every summer  
a river dries to a trickle  
in the sand,  
baring the sand ribs,  
straw and woman's hair  
clogging the Watergates  
at the rusty bars  
Under the rusty bridges with patches  
of repair all over them.<sup>48</sup>

The poem then uses animal images associated with the river. The wet stones shine in the sun like sleepy crocodiles and the dry ones like "shaven water-buffaloes". The river is described in flood destroying people

and once again we have the image of twins "Kicking at blank walls/ even before birth" when their mother is washed away.

Ramanujan has used images related to city life too in his poetry. "Some Indian Uses of History on a Rainy Day" in Relations can be cited as an example of a poem that makes good use of city-life imagery. The poem opens with the image of office workers returning home:

Madras,  
1965, and rain. Head Clerks from city banks  
curse batter, elbow  
in vain be patch work gangs  
of coolies in their scramble  
for the single seat  
in the seventh bus<sup>49</sup>

Then unexpectedly the poem moves into history. They tell each other how "Old King Harsha's men" beat soft gongs to "stand a crowd of ten/ thousand monks" in a queue so that they could be given gold pieces, a pearl and a length of cloth. There is a reference to "the single visiting Chinaman," that is, Hiuen Tsang. The poem then shifts back to the present:

So, miss another bus, the eighth,  
and begin to walk, for King Harsha's  
monks had nothing but their own  
two feet.<sup>50</sup>

The second part of the poem takes the reader to Egypt and describes the tourists as children whose faces are pressed to the museum glass of the past. Here too, the past and the present are brought into the same frame of imagery:

faces pressed against the past  
as against museum glass  
tongue tasting dust,

amazed at pyramidfuls  
of mummies swathed in millennia  
of Calicut muslin.

The final part of the poem is set in Berlin where a professor of Sanskrit "on cultural exchange" is lost in Berlin. It is raining and the professor cannot spell the German signs:

1935 Professor of Sanskrit  
on cultural exchange;  
passing through lost  
in Berlin rain; reduced  
to a literal, turbaned child,  
spelling German signs on door, bus  
and shop,  
trying to guess go from stop.

Then he finds his way "comes home" suddenly when he sees "The Swastika" on the neighbour's arm "in that roaring bus from a grey/ nowhere to a green". His coming home has a significance that extends beyond the physical and the cultural symbolic meaning of the Swastika for an Indian.

Ramanujan imagery objectifies various states of feeling and often reinforces something that takes place at the subliminal level. His imagery is accumulative in nature and often succeeds in establishing a physical context. He makes use of colour symbolism very frequently and colours like yellow and grey are very commonly used. The sharp out line of the images, the concreteness and the sensuous quality of his imagery sets him apart from many of his contemporaries in whom tame philosophizing often mars their poetry.

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# ***CHAPTER – 7***

# ***CONCLUSION***

## CONCLUSION

The in-depth study of the entire bulk of Ramanujan's poetry proves the fact that he remains an out-standing poet for two reasons: the description of the highest emotive contents and the working out of these emotional properties of poetry (*Kavya*) with absolute propriety and *Sadharani Karana* (emotional transpersonalization). He is the poet who uses Indian culture symbols myths and images in order to work out Indian culture, Indian rituals and the Eastern-Western poetic theories for working out the emotional validity of human mind in the objective manner. His poetic self presents a unique amalgam of the traditional and the modern. If his sensibility is rooted in the Indian heritage, his vision is definitely that of modernist's. His credit lies in his remarkable ability to maintain an appreciable balance between tradition and modernity and between the East and the West poetic theories. While on the one hand, his loyalty towards his cultural heritage does not veil his progressive outlook on the other, he does not get sweep away by the rising tide of the socalled onslaughts of modernity. Ramanujan is actually a gifted Indian intellectual who has savoured of both the Eastern and the Western culture.

Since this thesis analyses the poetry of A.K.Ramanujan and presents its critique on the basis of Indian Poetics, it seems appropriate to analyse in brief the leitmotifs of Indian Poetics before summing up the core chapters of the thesis. Aesthetics of Indian Poetics or the theory of beauty in art and literature. Aristotle's Poetics as the first treatise sets forth the theory of poetry, drama and art in general. As the aim of all arts is regarded to be the attempt to delight the human mind, the analysis of the joy resulting from poetry and drama is also supposed to appreciate the function, object and the motifs of poetry. In India, the Poetics Works the role of literature and its

application to human thought. As Aristotle in the West Bharata explains the motifs of aesthetic in the art of poetry and drama, his aesthetic is nothing but the analysis of the emotional experience.

Poetry is the translation of the Poet's experience through the medium of expression. The contents of poetry emanating from the mind of poet is transplanted into the mind of connoisseur. And it thus owes equally its existence both to the poet and to the connoisseur. In the light of Indian theory, the cognition or the factors leading to the range of memories shape and re-shape the form of poetry. In Ramanujan's poetry the treatment of the past is based on the objective analysis. He does not glorify his past as an autobiography but presents it for the validity of human emotions. One hardly notices the nostalgic longing for the return of the days of lore. He does not glorify his past with a luminous halo. In his recollection he differs vastly from the traditional poets such the Victorians and the romantics. He does not present the sentimental or personal contents of emotions in his poetry. Ramanujan relates his emotions in a calm and detached manner any of the grim realities of life. He expresses his emotions in the controlled manner a characteristics that comes near to the poetic theories of India.

In Indian Poetics, the concept of poetry differs from person to person. It also differs from age to age. A particular age regards *Kavya* as the greatest specimen of poetry, because the presentation of a great fresco of life is what is needed in poetry. The modern age is definitely detrimental to genesis of epic because the circumstances in which we live and have our being are completely different from those in which the epic originated. One is now in the midst of complexities. A.K.Ramanujan gives a glance of modernist elements in his poetry. His poetry centres around the inward consciousness of memories. As a major Indian poet in English, A.K.Ramanujan invites obvious comparison with his illustrious contemporaries for modernist elements. The poets to be compared with him

are: Jayant Mahapatra, Nissim Ezekiel, Keki N. Daruwalla and Shiv K. Kumar. Ramanujan uses freely the myths of India in his poetry and these myths become the objects of symbolization, creating the *rasa* and *dhvani*-the emotive and suggestive contents of literary aesthetics.

Indian Aesthetic regards the literary excellence, the diction, the poetic figures-all these are as essential elements in poetry. But it is reluctant to assign important places to any one of them because *Rasa* constitutes the centre of gravity of poetic art. Western Aesthetes also recognizes the importance of the poetic figure. As poetry embodies and illustrates its impressions by images of the objects, the poetic figures are to be valued in the art of poetry. As regards the poetic diction the Indian Aesthetics manges that the greatness of poetry depends on the power of the poet to employ the magical phrases. And A.K. Ramanujan is the master in employing the magical phrases and creating the magical effects there in. Exploring the obsessive memories of childhood, he uses the coinage of images such as "pink- crinkled feet" "the kitchen floor," "black-pillared" and "the aisles of book-stacks" create the sensibility of the extraordinary diction through the use of common words. A.K. Ramanujan as a child has a subconscious fear of snakes and that is the reason which justifies the statement of the poet\_ "a basketful of ritual cobras" had come to his house.

Western Poetics also attaches great importance to the employment of the magical phrase in the poetry. The use of such phrases casts its enchantment over the whole texture of language and it is through it that the exact experience of the poet is transferred to the experience. As the expression in the poetry is magical one, the aim un-expected meanings can be collected through them. Ramanujan uses such words, which become the objects to be analysed for the emotional transpersonalization. For example, *Hindoo Poems* of Ramanujan create the oblique expressibility of human thoughts. They mirror deeply the self-mockery of the poet. In "The Hindoo:

the only risk" he outrightly rejects the practice of denouncing spontaneous physical urges through a suppression of emotions. This he feels is not the way for attaining *moksha*. Struggling to maintain a cool façade at the sight of a woman's humiliation or not being affected by a friend's suicide or resisting the temptation to pick up the kitchen knife to hurt one-self or "carve up wife and child" can not be regarded as an attempt towards true freedom of the soul. It, then, covers the suggestive pattern of A.K. Ramanujan's poetry.

As a matter of fact there are always two meanings in the contents of the poetry: the literal and the symbolic (*vācyarth and vyāngarth*). The literal is capable of being conveyed through the medium of translation, but the symbolic remains incommunicable. The skill of the poet lies in communication of the symbolic contents by the use of the appropriate language. The symbolic is conveyed through *dhvanyartha* (suggestion). It is the function of *dhvani* (suggestion) that plays a prominent importance in poetry. It's this function of suggestion that bestows greater charm on the already beautiful and converts the most deformed into the mind of the refined reader. The skill of the great poet lies in his successful employment of the poetic function of suggestion. It is competent to bring into expression a reliable symbol of experience which is understood by the connoisseur. The provocation of images in the poetry A.K.Ramanujan communicates this process. And in the whole process of transference of the symbol of the poet's experience, the diction and the image play very prominent role, because it is out of the language that the poet makes a reliable symbol of his experience.

Ramanujan makes the use of simple and concrete images in his poetry for his suggestive pattern. By using the common place images, Ramanujan talks about the serious and the deep. For example his famous

poem "Shadows" picturizes a fine galaxy of images. In the first stanza the shadows become a cast when one walks in the sunlight. Shadows can not be formed unless something poses an obstruction in the way of light. While light is pre-requisite for the formation of shadows, doubts take birth in darkness. Doubts have a tendency to grow fast and no sooner do the seeds of doubts begin to take root than the complete mind is caught in the web of uncertainty. The images such as "the sun", "vines" "moss" and "manes" become suggestive of his communicativeness.

Thus the provocation of various images arrests the attention of the refined reader to his *sthayins* (dominant emotion) according to Indian Poetics. Every body is in the possession of these mental states. There is no being devoid of the impressions of these mental states. Only somebody has some particular mental state in excess (dominant emotion), and some other state or states to a lesser degree; some body's mental state is controlled by proper objects, while some other's otherwise. Thus only some particular mental state is conducive to a goal of human existence, and hence commendable.

The present thesis, apart *Introduction* and *Conclusion* has been divided into five well-balanced core chapters: *Tradition and Experiment*, *Poetic Imagination*, *Texture of Meaning*, *The Application to Vakrokti Theory* and *Imagery*. The first one deals decals with the importance of tradition for two motifs: how tradition intrudes according to the cognized mode of the author and how it creates the imaginative sight for the perceptiveness of the creativity. Indian Poetics hardly makes any distinction between the poet and the seer. The seer holds on tradition from spiritual points of view and manages it through his devotion; while he maintains the ideals of tradition through the myth and symbols from the past and by his skill of the poetic imagination he links them with his immediate present. A.K.Ramanujan includes two sensibilities in his creative process: one that

he inherits from his native land as cognition and other he receives from the west as his perception. Sometimes one witnesses the swinging of the two selves; but finally he maintains a perfect balance between the two selves.

The entire poetic and prosaic writings of A.K.Ramanujan carry forward the Indian ethos and he applies this distinctive racial approach to revealing the universal elements of human behaviour. Ramanujan as a poet deals skillfully with the imaginative perception of his childhood days and this perceptiveness figures as the tradition in his poetry. Thus, the idea of holding the traditional values is to synthesise it with the scientific and analytic temperament of modern man. In modernity, one finds three things writ large: reflexive consciousness the elusiveness of the author and his distinctive withdrawal from the text. A.K.Ramanujan, though he disowns his Brahamanical background in his stay at America yet he never allows the Western mode to make him Michael Madhusudan Dutta. He ever maintains his inherited sensibility and includes it in his work.

The poems such as "Small Town", "Convention of Despair", "History", "The Opposable Thumb", "Death and the Good citizens", "Snake", "Composition" and so many others deal with the experiment of tradition with a view to reveal the modern and the universal aspects of literature. Thus many of Ramanujan's poems reflect the fact that his roots bind him to the early years of his childhood. Though memories constitute a major section in the entire bulk of Ramanujan's poetry yet he does not reverberate the past happenings in the subjective manner. At times he has a sceptical attitude even towards the nature of memories. The poem titled "Lines to a Granny" can still be regarded bordering on fond remembrances. Ramanujan has a great regard for his grand mother for she represents the symbol of the past. Here the poet vividly recalls the breath taking fairy tales savoured by him long ago at his grand mother's knee.

Yet another aspect that attracts the attention of the common reader about the poetry of A.K.Ramanujan is his use of indigenous backdrop. The poem "A Leaky Tap After a Sister's Wedding" sets the Indian locale when the poet remembers his sister at his adulthood. This sort of device based on memories presents the re-reading of the social, mythical and cultural dimension. As Linguist Ramanujan's use of specific words is marvellous because, sometimes the sound of the words defines the sense of his poetry. The use of alliteration and oblique expression work out the essential ingredients of his poetic art. In the sound aspect alone, words in his poetry present a pattern of rhythm, alliteration and assonance. This is called in Indian Poetics as *sabdalankara*. In this way the words in his poems take the heightening form (*atisayaswarupa*) or they undergo a kind of transfiguration which is the sin quo non of the poetic art.

The most striking feature that strikes in the use of tradition is the poetry of A.K. Ramanujan is the revelation of the universal-cultural paradigms. The poem entitled *Still Another View of Grace* reflects some serious points of inner strife in the poetry of A.K. Ramanujan for he undergoes the conflict between his two selves: the one that represents his Brahamanical inheritance and the other that associates his mined from the Western Culture. Ramanujan as a poet, as a linguist and as an analyst of the multiplicity of cultural paradigms maintains equipoise and the perfect balance of mind and creates the universal sensibility of multiculturalism.

Thus the refusal to accept fully the tradition-led social system of Brahamanical order and the conventional code of parental heritage make him a poet of integrity an integrity that fills his poetry with an open-endedness and a higher poetic consciousness. As a modernist he works on varied controversies that make him distinguish between body and nature and tradition and modernity, nature and culture, and individual and poetic selves.

The chapter entitled *Poetic Imagination* as the core one traces the hidden points of the imaginative range of the poet and the application of the suggestion (*dhvani*) of Indian Poetics to his poetry. The chapter analyses Anandavardhana's idea of *Kavya Pratibha* or Poetic Imagination vis-à-vis the poetic excellences of A.K.Ramanujan. The word imagination in Indian Poetics itself suggests the making of images in the mind's eyes. These inner images of human psyche resemble the images of seen objects of life. If memory is the chief force of imagination, the poetry of A.K. Ramanujan becomes its finest example. Ramanujan uses the scenes of the external phenomenology just to express his imaginative height. For Ramanujan memories which are perceptions through time, he expresses through them the aspects of timelessness. Memory thus in the poetry of Ramanujan becomes the process of self-explorations.

The term 'poetic' in Indian Poetics represents an objective sensibility. The term Poetic imagination avoids totally the subjective images in the creation of poetic process. This Ramanujan comes near to T. S. Eliot's famous dictum-*the objective correlative*. Ramanujan's poetry explores the obsessive memories he recollects from his childhood. His stay at America sometimes poses apparent contradictions from the roots he developed in India-his home land. His frequent visits to India seem to have been for the purpose of renewing the roots of his cognized behaviour. The poems such as "Mothers Among Other Things", "Still Another for Mother" and "The Striders" create the archetypal images with the power incentives of Poetic imagination. The "heavy door" of his house that closed behind him when he left for America is symbolic of the door that he experienced as a child in India. The role of memories in Ramanujan's poetry is directly linked with the theory of time and space-the theory that reveals the universal /archetypal consciousness of time linearity. In Indian Poetics, the theory of *dhvani* comes near to the perception of memories which finally create the

sensibility of poetic imagination. Since the term "poetic" denotes the objectivisation of human emotion, the question arises what does the term "imagination" stand for? It is indeed the intuition which arises in the mind of the poet in concentric form due to the concentration of the word and its meanings. To define the process of poetic imagination is to reveal the process of creation.

Indian Poetic stresses repeatedly the connotative and denotative meanings in the comprehension of the Poetic art. Ramanujan works out the association connotation and denotation through suggestive pattern in the oblique manner. The range of memories in his poetry becomes the imaginative part for the memories in his poetry become symbolic of time-linearity. The poems in the "Striders" reveal the functioning of memories and the association of different streams of time. Along with the streams of time, it also reveals the varied threads of emotions such as anxiety, fear, sexuality and nostalgia. The poem "Small Reflections on Great House" bring into being the wonderful assimilative and digestive powers of the ancestral home that has an insatiable capacity not only to absorb the good things but also the unworthy actions. The ancestral house has been picturized as the metaphor of the time past which includes the childhood life of the poet. The idea that is reiterated in the poem is that the house has infinite capacity not only to contain things and people but even new ideas lose their identity as they enter its threshold.

The chief function of the Poetic Imagination (*Kavya Pratibha*) is to arouse the dominant emotion in poetry and that is called the relishing of *rasa* in Indian Poetics. The nature of the rasa lies not in comprehensibility but in its relishability. The term "relish" is undoubtedly of the nature of cognition though it is different from all other cognitions. Thus the substance of Bharata's aphorism on *Rasa* is this, that since relish is

produced because of the association of the *Vibhavas* etc, Rasa is the extra worldly object, subject to that kind of peculiar relish. In Ramanujan's poetry the range of poetic imagination produces different rasas together.

The next chapter, *Texture of Meaning* as the core chapter has analysed in detail the linguistic properties of the poetry of A.K. Ramanujan on the basis of Indian Poetics. The theory of meaning in Indian Poetics includes the three functions of the word: Connotative denotative and suggestive meanings of the word. Ramanujan as a linguist uses such words which express the manifold of meanings. Indian theories of *rasa* and *dhvani* describe repeatedly the essence of the emotive contents as the leitmotif of the poetic composition. The semantic analysis and the semiotic study of different words put forth by Anandvardhana brought the essence of the objectivization of human emotions. In the poetry of A.K. Ramanujan, the total essence can be had only after analysing the total effects of the power of the word (*sabda shakti*). With the philosophic aptitude of a linguist the texture of meaning in his Poetry can be felt deeply when it is analysed with reference to his social vision-the realistic vision of life.

His famous poem "Two Styles in Love" traces back the heightened range of his imaginative perception. The colour imagery "green" is to be converted into "yellow" colour. The two colours green and yellow are symbolic of two things: the sprouting of love and the reaching of its maturity. Once again the yellow becomes suggestive of the perfectibility of human emotions. The analysis of this poem brings forth a balanced combination of two cultures: the Eastern and the Western.

Semantic interpretation of any word/all words signifies the two meanings: the conventional and the derived meanings. Bharthari, the renowned scholar of the meaning of the words, has contributed to Indian Poetics the theory of *sphota* (burst). This theory stresses the prominence of the association of different words together; and the association of these

words after the cognized process of meanings brings forth the immediate effects of the meanings on the minds of the readers. It is primarily a theory of semantic and at the same time the semiotic study of the words and the related sentence to them according to the contextual and the referential meanings.

Since words denote their meaning according to their contextual effect, the *sphota* of the sentence as a whole should be regarded as the revealer of inner meanings of the poetry. The revealer of meaning is thus the semantic aspect of the *sabda* (word) and the revealer of this in turn is its own linguistic property. The total effects of Ramanujan's poems brings forth the validity of two meanings: the conventional and the modernist the use of images such as "wound museums of Hiroshima" "Buddhist barbecues" and "X-ray bones" reveal the instantaneous effects of the civilizational growth and the deterioration of human values. Apart from the linguistic improvisation these images also reflect the situational and the contextual referents. The textural design of Ramanujan's poetry can be understood only when one understands the cognized and linguistic mode of his composition. The poem "Turning Around" an inclusion in the poetic volume of *Black Hen*, becomes a wonderful for sealing the long passage of time. The flock of sheep inside it are the real sheep in Pahalgan of Kashmir in 1972. Thus, it becomes very clear that the entire essence of Ramanujan's Poetry can be understood through semantic and semiotic analysis which is called the theory of meanings in Indian Poetics.

The next core chapter, *The Application to Vakrokti Theory*, once again reveals the linguistic competence and the oblique expression in the poetry of A.K. Ramanujan. The literature in Indian Poetics between word and meaning has undergone so many changes in the hands of Indian theorists. The art of poetry has taken the form of the poetic contents of the expression and the expressed. The theorist of *Vakrokti*, Kuntaka, brings

some improvement in this theory. He shows that the real essence of poetry can be realized only through the balanced unison of the word and sense. Ramanujan as linguist poet deals with the obliqueness of the expressive mode. The oblique expression in his poetry Transpersonalizes the range of human emotions. Thus, Ramanujan touches the boundary line of Vakrokti theory, because it is the theory which exclusively deals with the linguistic aspects of the poetry.

The persistent theme that occurs in the entire bulk of Ramanujan's poetry becomes important for two reasons the phonemic usage and the oblique expressibility. The poems such as "Strider", "Towards Simplicity" "Death and the Good Citizen" and "Second sight" are entirely based on the oblique expression that is described as *Prabandha Vakrata* (Obliqueness in Composition). The contents of these poems become symbolic of *tattvartha* (suggestive meaning). In the series of these poems, "Element of Composition" is suigeneris for the relationship of body and nature. Based on the scientific analysis of human body, the poet brings forth how the composition and de-composition of human body (father's seed and mother's egg") is fertilized. Ramanujan's application to the theory of existentialist expressibility, one sees the application of two "selves" in his poetry: the individual and the poetic selves to Kuntaka, only the word meaning is not sufficient for the total understanding of poetic excellences of any poet.

What distinguishes the use of language in poetry is a special relationship between *sabda* and *artha*. Kuntaka calls this relationship *Vakrokti*. It is a kind of deviation from ordinary speech introduced by *Kavivyapara*, a poet's genius. In Ramanujan's poetry, there occurs constant wrestling between the subjective and the objective selves; and it becomes a beautiful example of *prabandha vakrata*. The first two volumes of his poetry, *The Strider* and *Relations* bring forth these ideas into practical shape.

In Indian Poetics the importance of *alankaras* is specially stressed for the aesthetic values. In the Western Poetics, the use of *alankaras* (the figures) is synonymized by the use of appropriate images. The chapter, *Imagery* as the core chapter, has analysed the poetic excellences of A.K. Ramanujan so far as his skill of using symbol, metaphor and the image is concerned. The image is nothing but a mental representation of the poet and connoisseur. In broad perspectives, it can be said that an image is an idea which receives and retains an exact view of what is observed. Image thus becomes an artificial imitation of the representation of the external form of any object. An image in the poetry of A.K Ramanujan is often an adventure leading the reader into unsuspected avenues of experience. His imagery is noted for its concreteness and for its power.

The poems such as "The Strider", "Snakes" and "Composition" reveal the concrete and the realistic the world through the images of Ramanujan. Ramanujan's imagery objectifies various mental states and moods of the literary device.

A careful textual interpretation of the entire bulk of Ramanujan's poetry convinces one of his poetic excellences. He is a poet and a linguist with perfect experiences of the East and the West. He is the poet who uses freely the range of his poetic imagination; he is a linguist who uses such words, which make one assess him through the literary principles of Indian Poetics. His conscious attempt to appear as a detached observer is probably the result of his a quest for artistic perfection; and this quest for artistic perfection makes him a poet who works on the process of *sadharnikarana* or the transpersonalization of human emotions. To be brief, Ramanujan stands as one of the major poets of Indian English Literature and one of the excellent poets of the world literature written in English.

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